TRUE LOVE

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

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BY

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments."

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PART I

CHAPTER I

FRIENDS AND RIVALS

LEAVING the *Herald* office, Arden paused before taking the step down to the street, and looked about him. He was faintly conscious of the familiarities; the ornate bulk of the Exchange, now in process of expansion, the lines of other buildings, the clanging trams, all the hurrying, changing forms which, at the instigation of Imalian, he had sometimes tried to see in terms of the new art. Imalian, of course, did not call it the new art, for to use an expression so crude would have vexed his connoisseurship; if you used it his kindly indulgence reduced your irony to a mere facetiousness. It was not Imalian that Arden wanted now, though a thought of that romantic Eastern crossed his mind. Imalian stood for deep and secret things. A man of the world, but he discoursed of prints or of bookbindings with that strange and secret look of his which suggested something infinitely beyond them. Bonsor did not like it; Bonsor resented it; "You cannot trust the fellow," he said. It is true that the reputation of Imalian's firm stood high in Manchester and that there was nothing positively against the man, but these Easterns may be honest for some inscrutable reason not founded on the rock. Bonsor rolled out his denunciation of Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics —such a phrase was a godsend to him—and he had no

use for minor distinctions. Imalian looked gray and stony when Turks were mentioned, but there was no denying that he was a Turkish subject. He was not precisely a Jew but he belonged to that lot; probably he was both an infidel and a heretic. Bonsor was an Englishman. "I am simply an Englishman," he said, and, up to a point, he could not trust Mr. Lloyd George. If Imalian should be put up for the Club it would be his duty to blackball him. In confidence he would tell you that he did not like foreigners of any kind. It was later that he developed an enthusiasm for the French, Russians, and Serbians—an enthusiasm which, before it wilted, reduced his favorite formula of "make the foreigner pay" to a hazy advocacy of a graduated tariff. But he certainly did not want them at the Club; "Let us be among ourselves," he said. And it was later, too, though before the Americans "came in," that he heard on good authority that President Wilson had Jewish blood in him.

Well, Arden did not want Imalian to-day, and he certainly did not want Bonsor, but he wanted somebody. The busy street produced all sorts of useless figures, and it came to him that it was Tim Burke he wanted. He remembered Burke's saying that when you want a thing the best plan is to take the simplest means of getting it, and, obvious as this is, it is not realized by those who conduct their lives on a complicated system of denials. Arden turned back into the office and telephoned to his friend. Ten minutes afterwards they entered a tea-shop together. As they plunged downstairs to the smoke-room, Arden bowed

to a young lady seated alone at a table in the upper room.

Perhaps it was a sign of the sympathetic nature which made of Burke a likely confidant that, before they were settled, he should say: "Look here! I'll let you off."

"Let me off?"

"You'd rather go and talk to that young woman than stay with me in this reeky hole."

"It's impossible, Tim." It was Tim in moments of friendly effusiveness.

"Why?"

"Well, don't you see that if I were such a blackguard as to leave you, I couldn't join her. It would be so marked."

Burke grinned. "You did think of it, then?"

"Not as a thing that could be done."

"You'll never be much good while you're afraid of doing things that are marked."

"Of course, I never thought of it. Not in that way. It only crossed my mind that in this cursed world you can't have everything. I'd like to talk to the girl well enough, but I wouldn't leave you for untold gold. One has to miss things. Think of what we're missing as we sit here! An infinity of charming girls who would like to talk to us, every kind of adventure, all the excitements of the world, even mild, pleasant, suburban things that are very nice in their way. And all I've got is you, you old devil. Don't you ever feel like that?"

"Who is she?"

"That's nothing. I hardly know her. She's Sibyl Drew."

"I seem to know the name."

"I must tell her that."

"A celebrity?"

"Local."

"She looks not very like an actress."

"You're getting too subtle, Tim. You're spoiling my idea of you."

"One's to keep within that?"

"Let's have something solid and settled."

"Is she an actress?"

"At the Playgoers' Theater. Yes."

"Ah! The Repertory Show?"

"Merely that."

"I don't seem to get the hang of these repertory people. Bit holy aren't they? Of course they did your play."

"They're just like anybody else. The actors, I mean. Of course a particular man or woman may be different."

"She's different?"

"I dare say. I came here to talk about something else."

"Fire away."

But he didn't seem in a hurry to do that. He toyed with cigarettes while Burke pulled at his pipe with a judicial air; Tim was rather like a comical old judge who would let you off with an admonition if he could do it decently. He was an Irishman with no nonsense about him, and it seemed that his share of romance

and the Celtic fervors was distributed all over his body and soul; it relieved his stolidities but it didn't make much show at any particular spot. He had been an engineer on a ship, and now that he was a sort of one on land—he had an office where those who wanted to consult him could, and he was the engineering expert of the *Herald*—he retained something of the sailor's charm, for the engine-room is not very far from the deck. He was not quite in his place in an office, but he was a man who could settle down anywhere. He was a calm Irishman.

Arden began to talk about his colleagues on the *Herald,* and particularly of the remarkable feat which, long ago, had been performed by Attar. Perhaps Attar exaggerated for the purposes of narration, but there was a time when it seemed that he was not getting on very well at " the office." His subjects did not inspire him, he made mistakes through an excess of discretion, he was not a good drudge, and his later brilliance was somewhere locked up in him. It was a crisis in his life when he got a note from the editor to ask him to call and have a talk about his work. No mere wigging in the editor's room this time, but a conference in his home, and there was an ominous friendliness about the invitation. Lindsay was the kindest and most generous of men, the most considerate of editors, but the *Herald* was his passion and he could be ruthless in its service. It was the symbol of the aspirations of a political idealist who would bring his aspirations to the test of reason. Young men preoccupied with their own brilliant careers and

without loyalty to the *Herald* and what it stood for would not find Lindsay pliable. Attar was conscious of good intentions, but he did not relish the notion of an intimate talk with so formidable a friend. He was consciously vulnerable.

And yet the interview had been a splendid success for Attar. At Lindsay's first hint he had led off with a sort of confession that ranged from analysis to aspiration, and it was followed up by positive proposals. If Attar had been a fool or a vulgarian he would have said that he had got round the old man, but it would be more truthful to say that he had found himself. He had set out, soberly enough, in a tram, but he returned gaily in a hansom—it was before the days of taxis—and the miracle, the glowing, stupendous miracle, was that he had accomplished a rise in salary; that was the sign and the height of his achievement. The fine flower of it came immediately, for the elated fellow retained the hansom, at great expense, for a drive into the farther suburbs. "He rushed into a drawing-room," said Arden,—"I am giving you my impressions of it—he scattered a tea-party, isolating the beauteous, the desired one. He was accepted, and, as you know, he has lived happy and glorious ever after. A remarkable triumph."

"A triumph for Lindsay," said Burke.

"And there's something in that, Tim."

"Where do you come in?" said Burke. "Have you taken to riding about in taxis?"

"No," said Arden, "my interview was not such a howling success."

"Got the sack?"

"No."

"How then?"

"Released with a caution."

"Why didn't you burst out like Attar?"

"I should have done it so badly."

"Which? The talking or the doing?"

"I suppose both."

"I expect Lindsay thinks you're better than you make out."

"He said something of the kind."

"All right, then?"

"Hardly."

And then Arden enlarged to the grave, good fellow about it all. Lindsay had told him in the kindest manner that he was not getting on. It was an age of specialization and he wasn't specializing. Burke grinned, interjecting, "Why! you chaps tackle every subject. How can you specialize on 'em all?" Arden explained that among them they were supposed to cover the ground. He had one or two minor subjects and wrote on them passably, but, as Lindsay said, he hadn't attacked any big thing constructively or even ardently. "Of course," he had continued, "you're all right here. You do a fair amount of useful work. But——" was it quite good enough to degenerate into a useful, hack writer? The interview had been depressing.

"It seems to me that the next word is with you," said Burke.

And then Arden began to review his inefficiencies.

and humiliations, while Burke contributed grunts that varied on a narrow scale. Arden had been pitchforked into journalism ill-equipped; without adequate training in economics or history or anything else. His schooling had been cut short early, he had pursued "business" half-heartedly while casual, copious reading tended to a sort of culture. And, really, he was finding the pace too hot. He hadn't the boundless energy to overhaul the others. "I'm not of the jealous, emulous disposition," he said. "Oh, dear! My timidities, niceties, covert advances, reticences, humilities. Yes, and my bursts of arrogance when I feel as good as any of 'em. After all, I've done a lot. I've emerged at least."

He had accomplished one great dead lift to get himself where he was, and now he was called on for another and another. It wasn't as though he were a genius. He had a certain capacity for taking pains but not an infinite one. When Lindsay wanted a new man on the staff he wrote to some bigwig at Oxford and asked for a list of the best young men about. Brilliant young double-firsts tumbled over one another to get on the *Herald,* but they had to be something better than double-firsts to stay there. Yes, the pace was hot.

"You want a better conceit of yourself?" said Burke.

Was that it? Was he failing through modesty? Certainly he was not going to succeed in the world by a brazen effrontery of the Mr. Stryver kind. And that couldn't be done on such a paper as the *Herald.*

Outside, success might come with a fairly good article well-advertised, for that is the way of the world; the foodstuffs advertised on the hoardings are not at all bad, the men who are pushing to the front have some talent to exercise when they get there. On the *Herald* there wasn't much pushing to be done. You had to make your way by veritable brainwork; even the reporters never got a fair chance with headlines. And always there was the close, not unfriendly, but real, persistent criticism of one's colleagues. In the early days he had found the idea of this vastly exhilarating. "So that I draw the breath of finer air"—he had quoted Meredith—"station is naught." It was one of the jocular traditions of the office—and not without some foundation—that George Meredith had been refused a job there. He wasn't quite good enough. So the young intellectuals would put it to heavy outsiders. They played at being prigs. Never was such a set of boys. They were boys even when they verged on middle-age, and they would write like boys. It came of the inspiration of the great Secretan, who was an article of religion in the office, and of a religion unstaled. His ideals were austere, and he made fun with a charming buoyancy. Of course he was a scholar and brilliance was mated with experience. He worked in politics without being precisely a politician. That was more in the way of the great Round, whose ability was considered an unfair dispensation of Providence. And then there was Brecher, of Semitic origin and lively coloring, which caused him to be known affectionately as the Pink 'Un. It was an office joke

that certain tyrannical rulers of the near East had put a price upon his head.

A good deal of intellectual ragging went on amongst them all, with perhaps the exception of Secretan, who had always wit enough to extricate himself from the claims that might trespass upon his precious reserve. He was immensely generous and profoundly critical. He kept himself in a timid, arrogant seclusion, and you could imagine—or you couldn't—what an overwhelming thing his friendship must be. Once he had startled Arden by saying that a writer should be able to perceive a distinct improvement in his style every six months; perhaps Arden had added the word "distinct" himself, for to Secretan it would be redundant. His precious style which was as natural as a schoolboy's chatter! These guarded egoisms seem to make loose, careless fellows of the rest of us. Masefield wanted Synge to add an explanatory stanza to a ballad. "Yes," said Synge, "but I can't take your advice, because then it would not be quite my own." You can be jealous of the interference of your ancestors.

Arden had not lost his early loyalties and admirations as he came to know these men better. The mutual admirations of the *Herald* were a stock jest, but they could not become mere attitudes while the men worked side by side and critically. Life cannot be all ideals and generosities and these men, after all, were struggling with one another, if not for a living, for the pride of place. That was the point. They were rivals and friends, and Arden could carry on his

conception of a generous rivalry till he imagined a strife to the death in which friendship would remain. It was a fanciful conception, but in the time to come it was to help him when he and one dear to him needed help.

He did not draw it quite as fine as this to Burke, who was a man to scent nonsense afar and might grow just a little restive under the exposition of ideals. But Burke was the man to see a thing apart from its froth or fringes, and, what was more to the point, to make his friend see it so. "You see," said Arden, "it would be rather horrible to be excluded. There are times when a man craves kindness, and then he begins to fear it. I don't like the idea of the time when people say, 'Is old Arden still there?' And at the end of a long vista I see myself retiring with the honors of service and a casual goodwill. My dear chap, there are days when I feel played out because I know that I shall be played out. I'm getting soft. All my fiery indiscretions are left behind. Am I mature and wise—or blunted? The theaters now—do you ever read my notices? I'm getting old and tired and kind."

"You've just lost your first wind."

"That's all that's any good."

"Rubbish," said Burke.

"You've got to work when you're fresh—or in spurts."

"Over a four-mile course?"

"That's no analogy."

"I'm not done," continued Arden. "Don't think I

mean that. Let a man have the luxury of a good cry. I'm too dogged to yield, but one has stagnation and repetition periods. I try to be honest with myself. I can be interested in politics or anything else when they're kindled. It's the intellectual problems that I revolt from. If they were human and dramatic, now!"

"You seem always to have plenty of work to do," said Burke.

"Oh, I'm not idle. In fact, I'm a drudge. That's the devil of it. I'm a drudge with the indolence of the drudge. I want a new start."

"Then take one."

"The indolence of the drudge."

"I've heard you fellows say," said Burke, "that if you want to know anything you must begin to write about it."

"Well?"

"Just start doing something."

"I'm always doing something," said Arden. "I'm at it all day long."

"Then there's nothing the matter. It's what they call neurasthenia."

Imalian came in, and after his gentle greetings he mentioned that the little Drew person from the Playgoers' was upstairs. He spoke of her approvingly, as he would of a fine piece of china or the book which he presently produced; these things appealed to his taste. He would share the simple pleasures of the collector with you, and you could believe that he had found quite a tolerable game, but sometimes there

was that in his handling, or the deep, abstracted gaze at the precious object which justified him; your suggestion that you went straight to the spirit of the thing while he delayed over mummified forms was altogether too crude; it died away. He added one thing to another and perhaps he had a ritual of appreciation; to see him move among his collections made it possible to believe that. It was a surprise to discover that he was extremely modern. He seemed to know just where the young pioneers of the arts had arrived or thought they had. A good deal he would brush aside quietly; when he stopped to ponder you would stop too; rarely, he gave the decisive word.

Imalian spoke politely about Arden's one-act play. It had been a rather lurid affair, and he dwelt on one or two curious and intimate things in it. The big, rhetorical effect didn't interest him or he took it for granted. Arden had the half-resentful, half-whimsical idea of luring him on to talk of *Othello*. And, doubtless, he would have been equal to that. The easy, emotional rush to the grandiose was not his way, but may you not conceive even *Othello* as the lightnings playing over a deep, still pool?

Miss Drew had not been in Arden's play, and Imalian was very much interested to hear that she would have the chief part in his forthcoming comedy. This was a full-sized, four-act affair, and was soon to be put in rehearsal. He wanted to know whether the actress's study of the part involved long conferences with the author; it was pleasant raillery, and they were all conscious of the little woman drinking her

tea upstairs. She was something of a discovery, she had had no great success yet, but she had given hints of capacity and she didn't look like a woman who would fail. Imalian was curious to know whether Arden approved of her for his heroine, and it was a pretty obvious thing to say he would know better after two or three rehearsals. Being in the state of self-consciousness that induces talking, Arden said that she was rather small. Imalian pondered this remark, so devoid of brilliance—he was not very tall himself—and invited Arden to explain how it mattered. This was not easy, and he could but plead some hazy mental picture of a more commanding figure. "Ah! the poses!" said Imalian, and hastened to agree that they mattered, suggesting, however, that every one was big on a stage, though, obviously, some were bigger than others. They trailed off into some discussion of the great Irving's inches.

Imalian bent a kindly glance on Burke with some remark, indicating Arden, about these men with two strings to their bow. Imalian and Burke had not many points of contact, perhaps, but Burke sat there pulling at his pipe, not disapprovingly. He saw no harm in Imalian, who probably regarded him as a good specimen of a type which he did not greatly affect. He did not collect Toby Jugs, for instance, or Rowlandsons—the instances are barely relevant—but any one could tell that there was a good deal in Burke under the surface. Arden had thought of them as two men not destined to get at one another and they did not commonly make the effort. Now, however,

Burke did respond to the other's remark. "I'm an Irishman," he said, "but I'll tell you a story about Burns. You know that he was a good plowman. Well, there was a lad on the farm who did his best to emulate him, and at the end of a day's work he came to Burns and said, 'I kept up with you to-day.' And Burns said, 'Yes, but I've made a sang.'"

Imalian nodded approvingly. "Poor lad," he said. "It didn't seem quite fair."

"Let's hope he didn't think much of sangs," said Arden.

"Now, as to the application," said Burke; "are this fellow's songs any good?" He pointed at Arden with his pipe.

Imalian complimented him on the story. "And so cunning of you," he said, "to emphasize the essential word by making it the only Scottish one."

Burke disclaimed. "It's the only one I recollected," he said.

"You got right instinctively," said Imalian, and Arden saw him for a moment as a suave Oriental.

"Are his plays good enough?" said Burke.

"The only one I've seen was very successful," said Imalian. As Burke seemed to be waiting, he added, "Good enough for what?"

"To leave all and follow them."

Arden intervened. "Let him see them first, at least," he said, "and even then Imalian is not the man for downright opinion. You've got to cultivate him. He hasn't got himself made up in little packets."

"Surely he can give an opinion," said Burke.

" I'm a plastic artist," said Imalian genially. " Not articulate."

" For instance," said Burke with a certain ruthlessness, " is there any money to be made by these plays of his? "

Imalian gave the point polite consideration. " Somehow," he said, " I've got into the way of associating art with the spending of money."

Burke grunted and got up. They all got up and passed upstairs. Each of them glanced at the place which Miss Drew had vacated.

CHAPTER II

MARY AND GEOFFREY

GEOFFREY ARDEN lived with his sister Mary in a little house, something between a survival and an eccentricity, that broke the line of Grayling Street which connected the Oxford Road with Upper Brook Street. The street's name was a mystery, but a slightly stimulating one, and they took a good deal of pleasure in the individuality of their house, standing back from the road in a quite appreciable garden, which was kept decent rather than gay. The house had a number, but you could find it without, which was something to be thankful for in a street generally uniform, and it had a stucco front and gables, a respectable amount of antiquity, some tradition of learned occupants, and low, rather quaint rooms. It was considered to suit the Ardens, and particularly Mary Arden, who was so full of sympathy for her fellow-creatures and so rarely got into line with them. It had seemed the obvious thing when Geoffrey joined the *Herald,* that she should come to keep house for him, for she was the only other unattached member of one of those families which for years seem almost impervious to change and then scatter and dissolve. Mary and Geoffrey had lived most of their lives in another Man-

chester suburb, and most of their education had been received in Manchester.

They lived together as a matter of course, and yet each had doubts and reticences about it. They had sympathies and affections profoundly, and yet all sorts of tricks of reserve had grown between them. In the old days, the family had been a pretty voluble one, and the ardent young people had taken some pride in the exclusion of what they called sentimentality. Perhaps something had gone with it, and Geoffrey could recall with amusement disputations on pure tragedy, utilitarianism, or the survival of the fittest. They seemed to leave little room for tenderness, and it was Mary who would commonly put in some plea against the logicians. She had a way of her own in taking the world; she would not accept easy conclusions against it.

Yet at times she would blaze out into a Sermon on the Mount to the disconcertment of any man of the world irony. She drove athwart Geoffrey's moods, and he found himself involved in passionate arguments with her, half-agreeing sometimes and roused to an extreme of antagonism by the mere irritant detail. She had had about her so often and so long, those who did not see as she saw that now she would assume opposition and break defiantly into it. She was intensely democratic, but she was intensely conservative too. She would not accept the inevitable; she would not make terms with the devilish. The jokes were against her, but she had a disarming perception of them. Her courtesies with servants had sometimes

run to curious extremes, and she had to give up shaking hands with them when it appeared that they did not like it. She had been known to insist on giving a market woman the fantastical price named in the preliminary palaver, for it was plainly wrong that you should give a poor woman less than a fair price because the exigencies of the market favored you. A moral problem bothered her when Geoffrey suggested that it was his money she had spent. She was not of this world, it seemed, or she was penetratingly of it.

Walking home that day, after his talk with Burke and Imalian, Geoffrey imagined himself discussing his prospects, his life, everything, with Mary. She would be immensely sympathetic, he knew; she would want to go deep with him. And he was so vague about it all; he didn't know what he wanted or what he could do. He was drifting, and to drift is a great prepossession. Sometimes when he had talked with Mary about himself he had felt like the young man with great possessions when that unreasonable demand was made upon him. If he had only had a clear conception of what he must leave and what follow! Mary might help to clarify, but it seemed almost impossible to overcome his reluctance to speak to her. Perhaps it was indolence at the heart of him. Rude circumstance has made great men of those who would never have been stimulated from within.

He found Mary in the little front garden which had hardly yet escaped from its winter dankness. She was pottering about, encouraging the spring flowers with little kindnesses; she was an impulsive gardener.

As he approached he could see her bending over her work and then she straightened herself and looked about questioningly. She had this way of questioning her environment; she was never dull; it might have been a startling world. She gazed at the sky and then at the darkling houses about her as if with apprehension. She was young, much younger than Geoffrey, and dowdily, demurely garbed. You could believe that her clothes had been put away in lavender; she was one of those persons who could tend a herb garden without any degree of affectation. She was timid and very determined, meek and unyielding.

It was light enough for Geoffrey to see the startled, deprecating look with which she so often accosted him. He had sometimes been irritated by it, for it seemed to accuse him of a sort of brutality. It was incredible, but they had their quarrels. Her eyes would flash, her hands clench, she would speak vehemently and rapidly. And he would ride roughshod over her; to his chagrin, he would lose his temper and the thread of his argument. All the time they agreed fundamentally or might have done so. It was annoying that he should be forced into the illiberal attitude by her extravagances. So they appeared to him, and it may be feared that sometimes he listened to her with the ears of horrified convention, for he had the social sense and she had not. Of course she thought a great deal of him, he was a prime figure in her world, as she in his, and he had to guard against her assumptions of his importance. And now they met with the consciousness of a hot

discussion on capital punishment, in which he had gone further than he should in defense of law and she had classed judges and hangmen together as the true murderers. It had ended with some shy, emotional apologies which had the effect of an impalpable barrier between them. He wanted to tell her of his interview with Lindsay, and he didn't want to tell her.

He began to roll the lawn, and she went on with her coaxing and tidying. He pushed and pulled himself into good humor, and presently they went into the house in a state of natural amity. The light of a pleasant fire flickered over the walls, and the books always looked homely. Here was quietude, a safe retreat; life here with Mary would go on deepening without change. Deepening? There was the point.

He began rather abruptly to tell her of what Lindsay had said, and she seemed to listen with her startled eyes, interrupting little but always with something on his side; an inference or assumption making for his value or importance. Her loyalty was touching and it provoked doubts; a man may be a good fellow and shrink from impossible standards; he may ever decline the measure and exceed it. He began to feel harried. He was having a severe day; first Lindsay and now Mary. Lindsay had said: "I can't trust you if you don't trust yourself," and he had replied: "You may trust me for a bit more than I pretend to." At that Lindsay had bowed his head in meditation and then nodded assent.

Geoffrey told Mary this and she said: "It's only that you're humble."

"If you would excel you must not be humble," he said.

She shook her head impatiently at this, and they both recalled a half serious, paradoxical argument in which he had enlarged on the arrogance of Christ. He had no wish to pursue it. "I suppose," he said, "there are times in life when what one wants is a bit of hard thinking and a decision. I've drifted into a place where politics are necessary. You must be interested in politics and keen on your side."

"Well, if your side is the people's side——" she said.

"Oh, I'm sound enough, I'm all right; but this continual holding your own in argument isn't my line. I suppose it's not caring enough about the ultimate results, it's not applying imagination to the particular thing. Politics, you know, are most awfully exclusive. If you are to be effectual you must be ruthless to the other side. You must be adamant. You must understand their case so that you can guy it. A political movement is justified by a slight balance in its favor. But who would believe in you if you summed up so? You must make it overwhelming; a case so clear that it's half rhetoric. It's possible on paper, but not when you come to talk to people."

"There are many things to be done that are clear enough," she said.

"Yes, but they're not the things that come next. They're not what we're up against."

"Make them so."

"Try, and you spend your life preaching in the wilderness."

"A noble life."

"Or is it pure selfishness?"

"Are you different from the others—the men you work with?"

"I suppose I'm a dilettante beside them."

"That's hateful."

"Yes, I hate to be a dilettante."

"Then, why——?"

"But I shouldn't hate to be an artist."

She was silent, and he went on: "These political meetings seem stupid and inhuman to me. I can't keep on one side. Or I can only do it when I get irritated. That simplifies matters."

"Then you should be irritated by all the injustice of the world.—Irritated? Angry. Indignant."

Their talk was getting on to old lines, and he had no heart for disputation. Mary, as he told her in jocose moods, was a Red Republican, a Jacobin, for whom the mere liberalism of the *Herald* was too mild. And if he suggested that it is those who care for reform who will compromise, she went off on some excursion of the fiery ideal. The mere sanities did not appeal to her, and, indeed, they are so often merely indolence. She was not satisfied to believe that wisdom may be with the extreme; surely it must be; she was impatient of those who would falter or halt in the generous impulse; in labor and sacrifice she would always be with the extreme. And Geoffrey sympathized with her there. You may yield to an-

other's power when you would not to another's will. Poor Mary! She dwelt apart among her ideals, and she might have been a pretty girl wielding a tennis racquet. Men looked at her, advanced, and retired disconcerted or abashed. Women found some reproach in one who would not make the best of herself, and sometimes presumed to pity her. She was extremely courteous if you did not vex her, she was apt for the humor of the occasion, but she rarely contributed to the social jollification. Geoffrey did appreciate her, and if she had died he would have canonized her.

"I sometimes think I'm a poor creature, Mary," he said—"It's that you are not," she interrupted—"but I've doubts, I can't go for things bald-headed, like you."—"I only talk of it," she said generously—"I suppose I shall always drift unless, indeed, I could become, as Secretan says, passionate on both sides."

"What did Mr. Secretan mean?"

"Well, it's the artist who's that or may be."

"But he can't escape right and wrong," she said.

"His villains are right if they're good villains."

"Will you let me read your play now?" she said.

This was more to the point than abstract argument, and he thought now that he would like her to read it. He began to talk about his intentions in the play and where his difficulties had been. She proposed that he should read it to her with what commentary he pleased, and he liked the idea and then shrank from it in his reticent, self-conscious, meticulous way. With a shy jocularity she suggested herself

as a touchstone after the kind of Molière's old woman. He could not bring himself to agree to her proposal, but he held on to the tail of the subject, and they drifted to talk of the old days when they used to vie with one another in learning verse—yards and yards of verse. She would murmur her pieces in her bedchamber, while he spouted his about the house; broadly, he was for the dramatic and she for the lyrical or elegiac. She had had a curious little secret rivalry with him, for all her generosity. She was proud of him but that did not save him from flashes of her contempt. For, as a youth, he was inveterately grandiose and, in the particular connection, stagey. He used to make pencil drawings of big scenes—Hamlet shouting, "How now! A rat?" and poking his sword into the arras, or Othello taking Iago by the throat—and he would put his figures on a stage with footlights in front of them. Mary ridiculed this, and he stuck to the custom rather disingenuously, for he began to see the absurdity of it. But he did not draw much; he preferred to do the scenes "in the round" with himself as the principal. Mary had been induced to play Ophelia to his Hamlet in the "Get thee to a nunnery" scene, but this was in private and she would not do it before the family. He wanted her to be the Queen in *Hamlet,* too, and submit to the fiery denunciation of those speeches that are so sadly curtailed in the acting versions—the "Unpeg the basket on the house's top," and so on—but she shrank from that; she felt the gloom and horror of that colloquy while he exulted in its rhetoric. And they

did not go together very well, for it was natural for her to under-act—whether in her life or a play—and he would roll out the speeches royally. The family was more than indulgent to him, and he was sometimes called upon for the choice bits of his repertory even when friends were there. He would resist; he wanted not to do it but he wanted to do it, and sometimes he would and sometimes he would not. Finally, it might be, he would give them Hamlet's "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" or even Othello's speech to the council. Once at a small entertainment he had recited "The Dream of Eugene Aram," and the rumor ran that a lady had gone out; it was too tremendous. And yet he had failed to burst open his collar or to make himself look a wreck as it was said Irving did, and this was disappointing.

The glamour of the theater had come upon him, and if he strutted and mouthed there was something of a child's sincerity informing it all. It was Shakespeare —no less—that he affected, and Shakespeare is the greatest of boys' companions. The sound and fury compelled him, but streaks of the passion began to run through him; he nursed lines and phrases, and some, in his later judgment, were middling and some supreme. When he went to the theater he was not wholly uncritical, and, indeed, he had a secret conviction that he could say the speeches better than these actors did, though he admired the management of their arms and legs. And, really, actors in the classic parts have some queer intonations and stresses that an intelligent schoolboy might avoid. Of course, he

yielded to the spell of Irving, and began to imitate him consciously and unconsciously. If occasion had served he might have become an actor himself, and he had a dim notion of going to see some famous manager, compelling his attention, and astonishing him by the power and tenderness of his recitations.

Mary used to go with him to the theater sometimes, and they did not always admire the same things. It was faintly irritating when she picked out some obscure little detail—as it seemed to him—for the praise that he would lavish on the tirades or some explosive scene. But sometimes they agreed thrillingly. She told him he was a *poseur,* and as he was not entirely unconscious of it his innocent gestures of the heroic or diabolical yielded to something more subtle of their kind. Boys who get beyond the simple appetites do commonly have a period of physical and mental posturing, for they imitate what seems good to them. Geoffrey thought himself a superior young fellow, no doubt, and alternately he scorned those about him who could not share what he thought his deeper life, and made pathetic advances to them. For he was a companionable fellow, on the whole, and liked fun well enough. He had some decent and fairly sincere phases of self-abasement. Having acquired the trick of introspection he was dashed sometimes at the poverty of what he found within; he examined himself from without and found much to correct. He considered himself too much—it was a relief sometimes to have hearty reactions among hearty people. Even in his schooldays, he had been a little over-conscious

of his personality. With others beating him in one thing or another, he had framed the question: "How am I better than others?" And yet when chance had thrown in his way that glibly-used phrase, *noblesse oblige,* he had made of it a secret possession. They might be more learned or stronger or swifter than he, but—he had himself, after all; he had a kind of faith. Presently he was to realize some of the dangers of egoism, and when he read Meredith's great exposure it was with an amazed perception of the pitfalls that he had not always avoided. If he had had an inner light it was left burning before a shrine while he stumbled in the darkness.

Geoffrey had been to an expensive preparatory school where all was jolly and correct, but a necessary cutting down of expenses "condemned" him to the Grammar School. Yet to conceive this as condemnation was unworthy, for it is a great school and worthy of the best. But he had moments of dark resentment, and as a boy dimly conceived himself as a tragic figure overburdened. He was not altogether unconscious of his absurdities and arrogances; some touch of humility may make the difference between arrogant and noble. At the Grammar School he found himself beaten in scholarship by Jews and Armenians, and his national pride revolted. He began to work hard, and if he did not always hold his own in class he was not far behind. He tried not to regard foreigners as aliens; he was determined to be liberal.

He had friendships, if not enduring ones, and once

an intimacy with one of the older boys soon to pass on to the University, became a subject of badinage or reproach in the family. He was accused of copying Linton, and this became one of the small impulsions in a determination to be himself. For when he turned upon Linton for lights with which he was accustomed to inspect himself, he found it wouldn't do at all. Linton might be all very well for Linton, yet now he perceived a danger in these easy boyish imitations. But may you not imitate the heroic figures of history? He realized that even his inner life—his spiritual life, as he presumed to phrase it—had been made up of imitations. All these mouthings and recitations of his had been imitations. He had proposed to interpret Othello and Hamlet, and he had imitated Irving. It was very discouraging.

And now when Mary proposed to him that he should read his play to her he cast back to these old times when, as it seemed to him now, she was so simply and completely herself, while he splashed about among big figures and resounding phrases. Once he had sat silent while she repeated the whole of the "Adonais," and he had thought she did it rather spiritlessly, but nevertheless he was humbled; he had felt himself loud and shallow and rhetorical. He did not understand that element of assertion, of defiance, that had prompted her to the feat. His compliments upon it had been too extreme for perfect sincerity, and she had resented comparisons leveled at his own superficial performances. He had been bitter with himself, rather than generous to her, and they had

had a queer, strained disputation in which neither was quite sincere. But they had had many disputations which, in the things of the theater, ranged from Ibsen and *A Doll's House* to *The Only Way,* in which and its kind she persisted in finding, or at least in seeking, some sort of sincerity, while he would sweep them aside as negligible and worse.

These things were in his mind as faint repulsions, and he felt that he would not read the play to her, especially as it is so bothering to read a play because you must decide whether to differentiate the speakers by alterations of tone or to repeat distractingly the names before each speech. It was a trifle to sway him, but he recollected too that he had found her vague and unsatisfying about his one-act play. He had wanted her to say that it was good, and he could have accepted a decision that it was bad, but Mary was not one to be pinned down like that. She would not translate implications and inferences into downright praise, and he was ashamed to desire it. Rehearsals and performance had made an exciting little episode and the play had gone uncommonly well. It was a rather tremendous affair—"too big for its boots," as he said deprecatingly—with a pistol shot and a shrill note of tragedy; it was not exactly crude, but it was pretentious. In a humble mood he might have said that it was like himself, and perhaps Mary thought that, but she could not think it finally and cruelly. He hated the idea of the spurious masterpiece, and wished the play had been modest and fine. But he had the sense of the theater; he was sure of

that, and, like every quality worth having, it is a danger too.

It pleased him that the actors should find his lines uncommonly hard to learn. They complained that his speeches went jerkily and that you couldn't tell what was coming next. It seemed that there was a conventional diction of the drama, in which a sentence begun might fairly be expected to finish itself, but that Arden had a way of pulling you up and going off into something else. He was slightly uncomfortable when one of them used the word " staccato " to describe what he meant. " But, of course," said Mr. Upjohn, " it's because you're original." This was pleasant, though Arden didn't know precisely what he meant. They were all very nice about the little play and very polite, and the principals assured him that they liked the parts and could make something of them. The manager was deferential and encouraged him to make suggestions or even, if he pleased, to take a leading part in directing the rehearsal. Clearly, however, this was not expected, and Arden was far too uncertain of what he wanted, to do anything of the sort. He sat at a little table close up to the middle of the footlights with the manager, who was the producer, and enjoyed the queer experience. It seemed, however, that nothing was further from the minds of any of them than his play as he had conceived it. What did matter enormously was the position of the chairs and tables, and whether, for instance, if Miss Framlingham took three paces to the left it would be possible for Mr. Upjohn to avoid the sofa without disturbing Mr.

Elleray. When they did get to the lines, the actors had to be pulled up frequently because they laid the stress on conjunctions or prepositions, leaving the passionate adjectives and portly nouns enfeebled. They went astray like children, and yet Arden could perceive that they had the root of the thing in them. The chief concern was with primitive points of technique, but the spirit shone through sometimes in an exquisite intonation or a gesture that shaped his meaning. Once or twice he intervened with an explanation of what he had intended, and the actor listened indulgently while the producer brooded over the furniture.

It was queer and fascinating, and he began to see the charms of the stage in its undress. The place was gaunt and lofty and complicated, and everything seemed unfinished and ramshackle. He was to discover what an amazing faculty actors have for closing up the gaps and making a plausible presentment. That is what they do. They are not students. They are like an architect whose concern is all with the façade. You might as well study human nature in fashion plates as in the theater. It is a discredited institution nowadays—it has got so far on the road to reform—but it is good fun and you may easily persuade yourself that it has great possibilities. And, of course, it has if you have the patience to wait a generation or two. Arden thought of it sometimes as a good idealist should, and sometimes it was all little more than a lark.

While his one-act play had been rehearsing a little

lady had peered in at them and smiled comprehensively, and he was told that it was Miss Drew. Decidedly the theater is romantic. And does it not strike to the center of things? It explores personality, it gives personality its chance. That tiresome attachment to a particular series of events which we call politics seemed very much less than worth while. Miss Drew was rather a neat little creature; he had conceived actresses as much more flamboyant than that.

He had wondered whether the theater might be a possible way out for him. Every young man who does not pay strict attention to business dreams sometimes of the stroke of luck—not unconnected with latent ability—which shall knock business silly. These repertory theaters have no money in them, perhaps, but they give you a start, and they accustom you to aim at some sort of quality. Arden had not the intention to write bad plays for money, but it did seem to him that there was room between the impracticable idealist and the people who thrive on popular rubbish. He had no difficulty in making up sententious formulas about it, and he sometimes fired them off at Mary. "Art must be conditioned and limited," he would say, and she wasn't very much impressed; she wanted to know what he felt and thought. It was more to the point when he told her that Miss Drew, who was to have the principal part in his comedy, was in lodgings not very far from them. "You'd like me to call?" she said thoughtfully, and he had affected to consider it—he was not above humbugging himself—

and to decide that it might be useful to get into touch. "You could explain to her what it all means," said Mary playfully, and he had become sententious again about the actor's instinct and his incapacity for thought and judgment. Mary had listened rather skeptically, and said "They can't all be like that," and he had laughed and agreed, realizing that he was putting a thin layer of words over a pleasurable emotion. Mary became rather somber, for besides being extremely liberal she was extremely puritan, and calling upon young actresses was not in her line. Yet she was happier when she thought of kindnesses to a poor lonely girl in lodgings, and though this aspect hardly belonged to Geoffrey's idea of Miss Drew, he did not discourage it. Certainly she would call. And, as it was impossible for Mary to maintain an attitude involving patronage, she asked Geoffrey if he supposed that a brilliant young person like that really wanted to see her. "You are my sister, you see," he said with bold jocularity, and she thought she did see.

CHAPTER III

MARY AND SIBYL

THE new comedy was a very different matter from the one-act play. Geoffrey had judged that shrewdly and justly, but he couldn't make out how good *Alice Dean* was. He was ordinarily a slow writer, but he had got on surprisingly fast with the first act, and he seemed to have made the discovery that it is easy to write plays. It was an illusion, no doubt, but not wholly an illusion. His experiments in novel writing had proved immensely laborious, for he ruminated and weighed and balanced, and he had every trick of delay. Now and then the dialogue had run on a little, but he knew the dangers of dialogue, and had digested the dictum of a famous novelist, that it must not be used when narrative would do as well. And now in playwriting he might revel in unrestricted dialogue, or so, at first, it seemed. Of course it was not so simple as that, but he had some good half-hours and was sometimes a little alarmed at his facility. One speech provoked another, and his characters seemed to do the work themselves. It was early in the play that he got his great encouragement. The preliminaries were over, and he had manœuvered his people into position. And then, rapidly, he wrote down half a dozen speeches, pruned one of them and stopped. He

could do no more, he dare do no more then. It was greatly exciting. There had been a revelation, and the play, he saw, was not going to be quite what he thought; his first conception of it had been hard and unkindly. He read the passage over and over as a composer might test his air, finding it sufficient and impeccable. Oh, the life of the artist was the only one worth living!

He got out into the open air and, pacing about the little garden in the spring morning, he felt extraordinarily happy. His mind soared away from the play vaguely into the new life. The world was all before him and there was no hurry about the choice. All was easy; the big things were easy. He had found himself.

Seeing Mary at the window, he had the impulse to tell her of his great discovery, but even then shyness intervened and he couldn't do that. She had known that he was at work and must be wondering what he had come out for. But, of course, writers do pace about the garden looking for ideas, and it was not the first time he had done such a thing—the difference was that the idea had come and was too big to live under a roof. Still, he couldn't very well spend the morning in the garden, though he was reluctant to go back to his work. And then it occurred to him that he ought to have pursued the vein, he ought to have taken his fortune at the tide. He hastened back to his room and read the passage again, though it was completely in his mind. There was no doubt about it; he never had any doubt about it. He made a small

correction. Then he squared up to the thing again and invited his characters to speak. They were silent. Their intense life had corresponded with his mood but both had sunk. He must come back to it when his energy was renewed.

The energy and the excitement were intermittent, but they did not die away. He wrote the first act under their influence, and good things kept coming easily, and sometimes, perhaps, things not so good. Then he toiled at his second act under deep discouragement, feeling that he had no more than a mechanical design for his play. He wished that he was Anthony Trollope and could go on doing a satisfactory day's work every time—no doubt Trollope had his ups and downs—but he couldn't spread out his inspiration evenly. He would do splendidly—or so the illusion went—and he would dry up or labor aridly. It meant that he had not learnt to work, to control himself. And, of course, he told himself that there is a difference between Anthony Trollope and the modern writer who puts quality before copiousness. The modern way is the more exhausting, unless, indeed, you are so easily discouraged that it is all rest and recreation; and it has its dangers of strain and emphasis. You cannot carry on a novel or a play by a series of lyrical inspirations, and yet Geoffrey was conscious of passages in which he had had something of the kind. His second act suddenly became alive with what he felt to be a strange and vital idea. He was excited again and the idea controlled him. It carried him beyond the seemliness of the conventions,

but he knew it was sincere and thought it was beautiful. He began the third act in good heart and it ran well, theatrically. Yes; he felt the jolly, sprightly life of the theater in it, and the idea was not dead, though it was overlaid with wit and fun. The fourth act was simple and satisfying; it gave the plain word—with dignity, he hoped.

He would not be ashamed for Mary to see this play, but all art is lonely work. The others see the wit and catch the ideas but not as the artist sees them. They may agree, but even sympathies and enthusiasms are perfunctory to his complex apprehensions of his own work; even if it were rigid, his mold is one and theirs another. He was conscious that what he did fell far short of ideals, but you will make a priggish affair of it if you are always bothering about ideals. He was half in love with the theater, and its glamour confused the Hymn to Beauty that he would have had clear and noble. And comedy cannot be entirely noble. At times he felt himself a *poseur,* and his almost austere conceptions of comedy were queerly confounded with traditions of claptrap. The theater is practical, and even an idealistic manager has got to make things go; he has to work upon actors who are plastic, but run easily into molds. Even at a repertory theater, ideals are not very conspicuous at rehearsal.

The cast for *Alice Dean* had been tentatively arranged. Miss Drew was to play Alice, and Elleray the man. Geoffrey was away for a week's holiday when he heard that the play was to be put into

rehearsal immediately, and then followed Elleray's letter. He read it after breakfast under a walnut-tree in a pleasant garden a few miles from Oxford, and an interested hostess did her best to sympathize with his snorts and jeers. For the letter was a request to be permitted to "alter a few lines" with the object of "making the part more sympathetic." It was not so much that Elleray wanted to put things in, but he did very positively wish to take things out. He could not give details in the letter, but Geoffrey might "rest assured that the greatest discretion would be observed," and that the character would emerge much more to the taste of the audience than in its original condition. Geoffrey's accents of scornful incredulity presently provoked a peal of laughter from the lady. He made a rather sharp bass second to it, but was slightly dashed when he realized that she had laughed at him. The enormity of the offense was not denied, but, after all, it did not exceed the comic measure, and in a second duet of laughter he was more in tune. Presently he was concocting telegrams, and the one despatched was but mildly ironical.

He got back to Manchester, and presently he was taking tea and muffins with Elleray in the "garden" of the big hotel. They were friendly to excess, and Arden was wondering whether they would be at one another's throats presently. They trifled over cigarettes till Arden picked up the bundle of cues and speeches which Elleray had rather ostentatiously laid on the tea-table. He glanced over a page or two, and

it seemed to him that there was going to be a devil of a row. All sorts of salient things were roughly scored out in pencil, and his first impulse to kick over the apple cart irrevocably was succeeded by a rather pleasant feeling of power; nothing could shake him and at the moment he cared very little whether they did the play or not. So he found no difficulty in being mild and amiable and treating Elleray as a reasonable being. He gave a little sketch of the general intention, to which Elleray listened with a slight sulkiness, and then they went through the part in detail. There is a good deal of the childlike in actors and perhaps this one had been a petted child. Geoffrey flattered, persuaded, directed, and his task was easier than he had anticipated. Once or twice he had to be firm, once or twice he made trifling concessions with an air of deferring to a mature judgment, and generally he showed Elleray how good the lines were which had been crossed out, and how remarkably they would tell when they were delivered exquisitely—as they would be. Geoffrey was not quite sure whether he was acting despicably or with refinement of kindliness and wisdom. Neither explicitly drew the inference that Elleray had been a fool, but this was somewhere in the consciousness common to them. The lines were restored, Elleray having thoughtfully provided himself with a piece of india-rubber. They parted amicably, though Elleray managed to convey presage of disaster to the play. "Well, it'll be a rare pleasure to me to see you play the part," said Geoffrey. He had certainly exercised self-control, and when the

actor had left him: "Who says I'm not a strong man?" he demanded of the universe.

With hesitations and misgivings, Mary had decided to call on Miss Drew, and it was really almost an heroical undertaking for her. After touching lightly on the possibility or desirability of it, Geoffrey had said no more about the matter, but Mary knew it was in his mind and she was too loyal to dismiss it from hers. Miss Drew was not at home, and so an invitation to tea followed. This, however, was a consequence of a hint after poor Mary had thought herself decently out of it for the time. However, the two got on rather pleasantly together, as foes might during an armistice in the days of chivalry. Mary could not but approve of Miss Drew's quiet manners which had nothing about them of stage meretriciousness, and Geoffrey was only doubtful whether Mary wasn't a little too markedly kind. If he had been away they might have got nearer to intimacy. They talked scrappily during tea and seemed to be a thousand miles from any vital interest. "This woman has got to justify herself," said Geoffrey heavily to himself. She was going to play Alice Dean, and so he waited for some convincing display of ability. It was stupid of him, for he was intensely conscious of her and he wasn't just a boy falling in love; he was critical and he was stimulated. It did occur to him that he wasn't being very brilliant himself.

Cigarettes were produced, and they thawed a little over the paradoxical circumstance that Mary smoked and Miss Drew didn't. Mary began to explain how

she came to smoke, and Sibyl how it was that she did not, while Geoffrey made shy comments about bridging the chasm and taking the edge off yourself. Then he plunged suddenly into the subject in their minds, and asked Miss Drew how she liked the play and the part, what her opinions were or her resentments, whether it was going to be an interest or a bore. He talked away, giving her a little time to prepare, but presently he stopped and confronted her. She did not reply at once, and the others waited as if for a momentous decision; and then she turned to Mary and said: "Do you like it?"

Mary was startled and for a moment, confused. Then she said colorlessly: "I haven't read it."

Sibyl looked from one to the other and then wished she hadn't done so. She was conscious of the other woman's jealousy, and Mary had hardly the desire to conceal it. Geoffrey was full of his play, and of that part of it which this girl would represent. It was now his strongest interest, and Mary felt that she was outside it. Doubtless he wanted to talk to this Miss Drew intimately and searchingly, and to pour out his own ideas and intentions. She wanted to leave them to it, and yet she felt incapable of going away on the right note. What was the right note? She resented her exclusion bitterly, but she would like to be coolly friendly about it—coolly, not coldly—and she was afraid that if she got up to go she would cry. There was hardly a pause before Geoffrey said: "It's queer that Mary hasn't read it."

"But you never gave me the chance," she said mildly.

"No. And the curious thing is," he said, turning to Sibyl, "that she's a good critic and could help. I don't mean a good critic, but she sees things that others don't."

"Then why didn't you make her read it?"

"Why?" said Geoffrey. "Why do we boggle everything? Why do we miss our chances and do the wrong things? And the literary man, the playwriter, is a shrinking, sensitive creature."

"I thought he was as bold as brass," said Sibyl.

"Shrinking from what?" said Mary. She understood well enough but she nursed her resentment. And she didn't want this woman to come to her assistance. In her heart she was afraid of liking her, and she would have been eagerly friendly at any sign of weakness or friendlessness. Miss Drew appeared rather a competent little person; she was decidedly handsome and not at all prepared to be pathetic. Geoffrey didn't make any reply to their last remarks, and Mary rose with quite a well-executed little laugh, and said that she would leave them to thresh out the character together. But Sibyl demurred. She said, "I'll come again when Miss Arden has read it—if you'll let me. I shall want her to help me against you." This was not perfectly intelligible, and Mary was in the mood which a downright man might have expressed in "Damn your magnanimities." Geoffrey said, "What's wrong with Alice?"

A kind of madness prompted Mary to say, "Is your

name Alice?" She didn't positively know—she didn't more than half know—that it was the name of the woman in the play. Geoffrey explained rather doggedly, and then there was a little sharp laughter. Mary sat down again and said to Sibyl, "What is it you want with me? How am I to help you?"

"It's his view of women—of a woman," Sibyl said. "There are things I resent." She paused and then said, "That's all."

"You don't want me to alter it?" said Geoffrey with an alarmed side-glance of his mind upon Elleray. She laughed and said, "Would you?" while Mary tried to look politely detached.

"I'm always open to reason," he said.

"I thought the artist needn't be," said Sibyl, and then he tried to explain how reason, taste, emotion all combined into a sort of dogmatism on which you would stake your life. "When you get things right, you know it," said Geoffrey.

She began to pay him pretty compliments on the play and he became restive. Then, "Of course I know it's awfully good," she said, "and different from a lot of the stuff we have to do." He couldn't get much out of her, and soon she went away.

"A pretty little woman," said Mary lightly, and she was conscious, Geoffrey was conscious, that this wouldn't quite do, that it wasn't so easy as that. Sibyl had impressed her—not by what she had done or said but by her reserves. A pretty woman with an air of reserve may become a piquant experience and Miss Drew certainly wasn't a chattering nonentity. To

pursue her into her fastnesses might be rare sport for the subtle wooer, and if it turned out all means and no particular end, if the fastnesses were empty, it might be difficult to find a way back. Mary's thoughts might hardly be phrased so, and yet she and Geoffrey had something like this in common. He had not reached the tender and chivalrous state of love—there was, indeed, a little canniness left—and she was almost afraid to discover that Sibyl was human and beautiful. Poor Mary was ready to despise herself, and yet would cling to cautions and distrusts that did represent something of danger to her brother. What could she give him of romance and of the ecstasies? She gave a timid affection, she was capable of a dogged devotion, if he chose a life of acquiescences she would minister to his comfort. For herself, the celibate's life seemed ordained, though deep in her heart, it may be, amazement and resentment were buried. She had a brother and was missing him in this intricate maze of feelings and repulsions. And then these women from outside come blundering in and they are baited with the trivial femininities; behind, perhaps, are the glories, the appetites, the destinies.

She and Geoffrey sat at dinner together that evening and he said, "You really must read that play. It's absurd that I shouldn't have made you do it before." And she said, "Oh, yes; I'd like to."

And then they discussed Miss Drew and agreed that though she might lack stage presence—Mary smiled secretly while she used this phrase—she had an at-

tractive personality and should give an incisive performance. They agreed that the rehearsals would be interesting and the first night exciting, that they would have dinner at the German restaurant before the play, and that it would be jolly to make up a little party. They were pleased and merry, and she liked to see him kindle frankly in a sort of schoolboy anticipation and excitement. Some word about the play itself checked him and he fell into a brooding; she saw him then as deep and sincere, the uncompromising artist. She had her pride in him, but the wider and higher he flew the farther she would be left behind. She had lost him; and she was too late; she had never had him.

CHAPTER IV

REHEARSAL

It still seemed a queer adventure for Geoffrey Arden to make inquiries at a stage-door, and the highly respectable commissionaire looked at him with suspicion till he gave his name, upon which he was rather fussily conducted down stairs, and along crooked ways into the bowels of the earth. He passed through some gaunt, ill-defined spaces and encountered one or two groups of ladies and men, who glanced at him curiously, before proceeding with what appeared to be desultory conversations. Then he emerged upon the stage and was confronted with the empty circles and the gaping pit. It was strange and grandiose and artificial, and perhaps it was something artificial in his mood that prompted the idea that here was a subject for a sonnet; a sonnet with hollow echoes and reverberations. The idea was in the easy, vague phase and he had not time to pursue it. Upjohn, who was the producer for the occasion, effected a few casual introductions, and polite inanities followed. Then Miss Drew appeared, looking very much like a young lady setting off to shop in St. Ann's Square, and she and Geoffrey shook hands. They had not, so far, got very deep into the recesses of Alice Dean's character, and Geoffrey wanted to say something illuminating

about it. She asked him a question or two, but he felt something of the restiveness of the dramatist called upon to explain what happens off the stage. He realized suddenly that he didn't know very much about it, and so he took the bold line that it wasn't his business. "That's for you," he said; "I dare say my explanations would only confuse you."

"But I may see it all wrong."

"Then I've failed."

There was a sham air of finality about this, but he went on: "You must see it whole. It must be your conception."

"But it must be part you and part me," she said.

There was a flattering intimacy about this, and he smiled acquiescence. Yet why was he saying these things to her? Was it sheer inspiration of the meaningless accident of wayward talk? He had intended to drill her into his notions of the part. And yet, no doubt, she was a young woman with a will who had every intention of doing things her own way.

There was a mild little marshaling of ideas, some experimental talk that didn't matter greatly. They were two young people happy together, and if something from their graver lives intruded it was but as the rare flavoring to a common dish. Geoffrey now was not serious as when he wrote the play. She was not serious as presently she would be, grappling with her part.

Elleray appeared, and his air was one of intense preoccupation. He was, indeed, immersed in the tech-

nicalities of his work, overwhelmed by the mere necessity of learning words. At night he would be acting a half-assimilated part, now he was to struggle with "this half-baked stuff of Arden's," already the next week's big thing was hammering at his mind. To be leading actor in a repertory company is an important way of living, but not a comfortable one. Allowances must be made for Elleray, whose talent was perpetually in the forcing house. It seemed that he never could rest except when he was acting; then he could achieve marvels of reticence or immobility. To-day he appeared at the same time to be inscrutable and communicative. The communications were mainly about lapses in management or failures to appreciate his point of view. Miss Drew regarded him humorously.

Upjohn came to Arden, scrip in hand, and consulted him about one or two points in the action. The scrip was scored with many pencil markings and memoranda, and Geoffrey said apologetically that he was afraid his stage directions didn't help much. They were extremely meager, and he thought that perhaps the producer would rejoice in a comparatively free hand. He put this point to Upjohn, who said: "Somebody's got to do it," with the air of an overworked man. And Geoffrey's heart sank at the idea that he was not very thorough. Perhaps he should have carefully scored every action and movement like those modern dramatists who knew the color of their heroines' eyes, and how many steps down the stage they take before they say "Good-morning." Perhaps he

ought to have insisted on being his own producer, and on molding all the performances to his own full and perfect conception. It is depressing to think that you aren't thorough, but, after all, there are different kinds of vision. You may be satisfied with the heart of the thing. You may toss your work to the actors, knowing that a little more or a little less of their control doesn't matter. Heavens! Where would the novelists and poets be if they were to be made responsible for all the expositions of their work? No; it wasn't a very close analogy. But where are Shakespeare's stage directions?

Geoffrey didn't say all this to Upjohn, but he thought some of it afterwards. He had a vague idea that Upjohn might say that the play was a splendid one and should be a great success, or that it was wonderfully subtle and deserved it. However, it didn't occur to Upjohn to say anything of the kind, and, indeed, you must not look for the expert to do his handlings of masterpieces reverently. He has to get through with his job, and a masterpiece may stand for overwork and exhaustion and the need of a holiday. Upjohn was a man who would naturally have brought things to a high state of refinement leisurely, and here he was, condemned to vigorous half-measures. He had the air of a disturbed dreamer, a man called up in an emergency and doing his best. No doubt he conceived himself as an artist, but he was a harassed one, compromising right and left.

Most of the actors scattered about had the appear-

ance of slackness and leisure; they were ready to play a little at life when they were not wanted on the stage. But there was a cry of "*Alice Dean;* Act I.," and everything became more businesslike. The idle actors left the scene, those who were "on" got into position; Geoffrey and Upjohn seated themselves at the table by the footlights and a stage-manager hovered about at Upjohn's disposal. The producer should be an absolute dictator, and if an actor is a bigger man than he, it is bad form to presume upon it. To Arden it seemed that much of what Upjohn did and said was open to question, but it wasn't questioned. It was an early rehearsal and so the actors were permitted to carry their parts in their hands. Some simply read them, some refreshed their memories continually, Miss Drew seemed to know her words. She did not act much, but her recital had some promising modulations. She begins, Geoffrey thought, by being perfectly intelligent. He was uneasy. To be intelligent is a good deal, but it is not to act and she kept on this plane of understanding astonishingly. He was assured of her sympathy, then? Not quite. He was only sure that she understood a great deal; perhaps she was even capable of finding him out. He was missing details and he answered stupidly when Upjohn appealed to him about some small point; Upjohn was punctilious in appealing to the author over what did not matter. With something between impatience and humility Arden intimated that he hadn't mastered the technique of furniture, and Upjohn responded with some platitude about the need for the material even

in the intellectual drama. It was intended rather to appease than to provoke, but Arden was impelled to say: "Do you realize that this play is crammed with emotion?" He said it out loud so that the actors could hear.

Upjohn looked startled, and, indeed, the interjection was excessive. Miss Drew had provoked it, and Geoffrey subsided with a murmur about intelligence not being everything. There was a slight, awkward pause, and Upjohn, mystified, said, "Well, well—to resume"—and they went on again. Geoffrey was conscious that Miss Drew had looked at him inquiringly; it was more than that, it was protestingly. And then she began to act furiously. She poured emotion into it, she used large gesture. She made it all too rhetorical. He was startled, and the other actors seemed a little astonished, but they responded in some degree, and the play began to take on life. Upjohn was puzzled, and muttered something about "letting herself go a bit." She was like an athlete exercising gently who suddenly extends himself and puts on the pace. Geoffrey was not sure how much he liked it. She went beyond him, she seemed to be neither Alice Dean nor Miss Sibyl Drew. He was vaguely jealous, he hadn't time to judge or think, and he couldn't trust his impressions. It was stimulating, and he perceived that these rehearsals were going to be difficult and fearfully interesting. He was losing his hold on the play. It had seemed to have a finality of form, a kind of perfection, and now this girl was shattering and rending and making a flux of what had been hard

and stable. "Confound these actors!" he said to himself—disingenuously.

At the end of the act there was a short interval while Upjohn addressed various cautions or incitements to particular actors. Geoffrey went up to Miss Drew, who met him smilingly, and waited for him to speak.

He said: "I don't understand you yet."

"You mean I don't understand Alice Dean?"

He reflected. Then, "Or is it that I don't understand her?"

"Well, now, that's generous," she said.

"You actors are a disturbing element. I think I shall go in for marionettes like Gordon Craig."

"What jolly rehearsals you'll have," she said, and he followed her glance up at the flies with its suggestion of strings and wires and wretched little dolls at the end of them. They laughed together, and she shuddered a little, at which he wondered passingly whether she was acting now, and whether there was in her mind, as in his, a vision of arid, jerking dolls in the empty theater and all the actors dead. There was quite a pause before he answered: "I admit that this is better fun."

"Did you like it?" she said—"just now?"

"It?"

"When I—Alice Dean, you know. You thought we had gone to sleep."

"Oh, but really——" he began deprecatingly.

"We have to please you," she said, and when he

came to think of her and this speech afterwards, he could not make up his mind at all what proportions to give it of irony, pride, or humility.

He said: "Does the author really matter?" and she: "You think we have no conscience?"

At that Upjohn came bustling up and the rehearsal went on. It continued for hours, and Geoffrey went out for a sandwich when he heard that there was no lunch interval. He didn't know whether the actors fasted or lunched in corners at odd moments, but when he returned they were still rehearsing and he felt apologetic. The rehearsal ended after three o'clock, and then the cheerful, overworked creatures melted rapidly away. The time of the next rehearsal was announced, and Geoffrey perceived that Upjohn was intent on extrication from his company. This was accomplished, and Geoffrey wandered vaguely down the back street on which the stage-door opened. He had not the definite intention of intercepting Miss Drew, but when he turned and saw her slowly approaching, he knew what he wanted. She seemed neither to avoid nor seek his company. He suggested tea with some doubt whether it ought not to be lunch. She looked at him thoughtfully, then at the watch on her wrist, and then she gazed for a time at the sky over the tops of the warehouses; for the moment she reminded him of Mary. She consented simply, and they went into what was called the garden of the big hotel. It was occupied thinly and drearily by belated lunchers and nondescript idlers; it had a slightly rakish air; it was not a happy environment. How-

ever, the teapot made a difference, and they talked pleasantly without hurrying to the importances.

Presently she leaned over the table and said: "You did think me stupid."

"Not at all," he said. "I thought you were all very intelligent. But"—he paused—"you seemed to be missing everything."

"Seeing things and not feeling them?" she said.

"Well, if I must be honest——"

"Oh, let's be honest!" she cried.

"Then," he said with a rather shaky sternness, "I felt it more of you than the others. I don't know that they were so very intelligent. But you seemed to understand and yet you made me feel that there wasn't much in it—until——"

"Until?"

"Until you burst out."

"You liked that?"

"Well, it was strange."

"Don't you like things strange?"

He said: "It's *my* play."

"And if I said it's my part?"

"Of course, I'm quite unreasonable," he said. "You were splendid."

"When I burst out, as you call it," she said, "I was angry. I thought you should let us get at it our own way. We were only reading our parts this morning."

He assented, and then he began to develop a little lecture on the actor and the play; it was partly theoretical and partly felt. He told her that there is a natural opposition between actor and author. "We

want you to interpret," he said, "and you want to create. You think your personalities are the thing, but it's our ideas that matter." He tried to escape heaviness by suggesting the play as the child of his fancy adventuring among ruffians, "and you, no doubt," he said, "think you're doctors trying to save a ricketty child."

She listened sullenly, and he felt that he was not getting on brilliantly. "You're the very superior sort of author," she said. "I've met one or two of your kind. You write a comedy, and then implore the actors not to spoil it by being funny; and if it's a tragedy, you want them to keep pleasant all the time."

He laughed unaffectedly at that and it thawed her a little, but he persisted in forcing this notion of the essential opposition. Perhaps he was proud of the idea; perhaps the deepening of his relation with her engendered a kind of revulsion. He was over-austere, he was rather ridiculous. Suddenly he saw her as a pathetic, lonely figure. He remembered with shame the theory of some bold talker that the actress to be supreme must be, among other things, a courtesan.

Poor girl. What an affront to her fine delicacy that such a thought should cross his mind! She was alone. These actresses are strangely detached. If they have mothers and fathers these are appendages.

He wanted to be nice to her, and this took the primitive form of a generous order for cakes. She was his match in wits, she appeared highly competent and self-contained, and yet, at times, she appealed to him as a child. He just wanted to gratify her and

he said: "What a beautiful enunciation you have! It's almost like that of a foreigner."

"A foreigner?" she said, and he feared that he had offended, but she smiled obscurely. "You would not make an alliance with a foreigner?" she said.

"An alliance?"

Hurriedly she said, "Yes. An artistic alliance. We actors are foreigners to you."

He felt extraordinarily friendly to her, and it needed all his native caution and his acquired punctilio to prevent his saying something excessive, rash, or premature. It is difficult to keep the wit cold when you speak about alliance with a mysterious, intriguing, young woman. So she appeared to him, and perhaps the childlike in her was a most dangerous quality. Happily, he hit a note sincere and friendly. "I've been captious," he said, "and I'm a fool. You're a wonderful actress and I'm as pleased as Punch to have you in my play. Will you believe that I'm enjoying it tremendously? I'm grateful to you. I'm grateful, really."

He leaned over the table and looked frankly, smilingly, into her eyes. He was startled to see them fill with tears. She looked away quickly, but she could not disguise the fact nor he his commiseration. "Have I been very brutal?" he said, and she shook her head. She stretched out her hand and he was startled again at the idea that she was going to shake hands with him. Fortunately, he had not time to commit himself to this idea, for she merely took a cake from the dish, a handsome little cake with pink sugar on it.

He found this curiously affecting. He thought she didn't want the cake and interpreted it, rightly enough, as a pathetic little clutch at composure.

"I'm not without emotion, you see," she said presently. And then she added: "I go like that when people are kind to me."

"But——" he said, and she interrupted him: "Oh, don't think I mean that people are unkind. I've a jolly time, I can tell you."

And then she began to speak most handsomely about his play, and they were bathed in a very uncritical glow of mutual admiration. It was delightful, and nature's subtle allurements were at work beautifully between them. So generous they were, so pleased with one another, and they parted in the utmost amity. "I was rather brutal," he said, and "No, but I was sulky," she said. Perhaps they were sane enough to see some comic aspects of it when they cooled.

CHAPTER V

LOYALTIES

GEOFFREY went to several rehearsals and always found it interesting, but it began to appear that all was not going well. The day of production approached, but the actors didn't know their parts, and the action, to put it moderately, was ragged. Men and ladies in the company came up to Geoffrey occasionally to discuss their parts, and sometimes they made a fine show of interest in the psychology of the characters. "Psychology" was a favorite word when Geoffrey was about, though he shuddered when he heard it. He was at a loss to explain the deep inwardness of his minor characters, but it seemed that rather perfunctory explanations would do. Everybody was very polite to him; with the exception of Miss Drew they were all rather solemn, and he realized that the play was regarded as a doubtful, if not a desperate, experiment. It was a little unconventional in its naturalism no doubt, though there was not a loose nor a lewd word in it, and even Miss Drew, who stood up for her fellows, admitted that actors are the most conventional of people. The head and front of the trouble was Elleray, who maintained an air of profound dissatisfaction, emitting at times slight interjections of distress. Having given way he now played the rôle of

victim with politeness, resignation, and a subdued anguish.

It was amusing, but it was not very comfortable. Upjohn grew portentous, and there was a good deal of gossiping in corners which Geoffrey sometimes broke in upon jocosely. He heard a whisper of withdrawal, and asked Upjohn what it meant. Upjohn was in genuine distress. Withdrawal would be a reflection on his attempt at production, it would involve all sorts of uncomfortablenesses, and, besides, Upjohn was a sensitive man, very much alive to the obligations and the courtesies. He hinted that Elleray was still sulking over his part, and lamenting the absence of those sympathetic touches that make the whole pit kin. Resisting an inclination to consign Elleray to blazes, Geoffrey sought him out and warmly congratulated him on his insight, his execution, and his effectiveness generally. "It's going to be one of the triumphs of your career," he said. He laid it on thick, but not too thick. Elleray responded, and, fine actor as he was, there was no difficulty in finding things to praise. Yet Geoffrey knew that there was a large infusion of insincerity in this attitude of his, and, illogically enough, he justified himself by his bitterness. His tongue bulged in his cheek, he was seething with vexation and contempt. He went round the company with assurances that they were doing it all thundering well and everybody was pleased.

And, of course, he believed his play to be all right. One day he went home to Mary and she asked, timidly,

how it was going on. He wanted to talk about it. "It's going on splendidly," he said, "and the duffers think it's a failure."

"The duffers?" said Mary. "You don't mean that Miss Drew——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" said Geoffrey in alarm. "She's loyal enough."

"Loyal?" said Mary. "Is it a question of loyalty?"

She was perturbed at the idea of another woman being loyal to Geoffrey. He proceeded to explain certain differences to be observed in the company. Miss Drew was acting beautifully, and, while putting all her individuality into the part, was always ready to do what she was told. And here, he explained, you perceive the true artist who, indeed, may be a slave. He (or she) is troubled little by the mere tyrannies if you will only leave his (or her) mind to work out its salvation. An illustration came in a dim remembrance of the worker in stone that Ruskin writes about. There he is perched high above the world carving his bits of detail on the Gothic cathedral. He is an artist of riotous fancy, living his life of ecstatic happiness apart from the world. When he descends to the earth he may be a person of no consideration, he may be thrust about, struck, kicked, treated with contumely. He smiles; he has cheated these fools.

He ran on in this strain, leaving Miss Drew behind. Mary said: "But in the world he becomes subtle and insincere."

"Perhaps," said Geoffrey, and then, remembering, he said, "She's staunch enough."

Staunch enough. Loyal enough. Mary did not like it, and when she did not like a thing she must try to be just to it. "You're lucky to have Miss Drew," she said. "She seems a person who could understand. Oh, she could understand things deeply!"

"I'm glad you like her, Mary," he said.

"Like her?" said Mary, startled. "Why shouldn't I like her?"

"Well, it's a great thing to be liked by you."

She blushed happily. She would have left it at that, but the invincible sincerity in her would not have it so. "I don't know her very well, you see. I admire her, of course, but as to liking—that will come, I dare say—or would if I saw much of her."

He was silent. He was conscious of the feminine resentments. They are exploited in a thousand vulgarities that catch the eye in comic papers or are bandied to and fro by the facetious. Behind them lies a little truth, but it is not truth till all the womanly generosity and renunciation are taken into the account. A man must be cautious when he speaks to his sister of another woman for whom he begins to care. A sister may blurt out things or she may be conspicuously cautious.

They returned to the play and it appeared that, vital as was Miss Drew's part, the body and bones of it must be upheld by Elleray. Of him Geoffrey could speak freely and humorously. He was another manifestation of the artistic temperament. His no-

tion seemed to be that this was a kind of season ticket for even the most extravagant excursions. In whatever way you made a fool of yourself you had only to say "artist" and the officials of the world—if they knew their business—retired respectfully or said "Pass." It was a little awkward, certainly, when artist clashed on artist in matters of business. They were apt in that case to develop business qualities.

Like most actors, Elleray wanted a fuss made about him and it was natural enough that he should. The advertiser and the artist become inextricably mixed, and the advertiser wishes to be regarded with affection. Actors have a pathetic desire to be regarded with affection, and in consequence they lose a little in austerity. Who has not seen a popular lady before the curtain making love to her audience *en masse?* And when the big man comes to a town he is a good deal occupied with thoughts of his reception. It seems to matter more that there should be a roar of applause when he comes on, than that some obscure person in a back row should perceive the fineness of his art. And so Elleray, craving affectionate sympathy, didn't like at all that he should have to betray ugly, sinister qualities in his parts. It was nothing to him that they should contribute to a beautiful whole, and in this he was supported by his customers in the pit who care very little about these wholes. A straightforward villain to be knocked on the head is intelligible, but how dangerous are these half-sympathies! How insidious is the art that would confuse a moral issue! Besides, there are certain unalterable grooves for the

sympathetic spirit; the emotions have their channels. The classical example is given by Mr. Bernard Shaw, who had been away for a holiday and returned to the theater to find his "Devil's disciple" kissing a strand of the lady's hair surreptitiously. The point of the play is that he should do nothing of the kind, but Mr. Forbes Robertson always used to do it in *Hamlet.*

Geoffrey talked himself into a good humor with Elleray. He wasn't going to play the part quite as it should be, perhaps; he was broader, bolder, more impudent in his audacities than Geoffrey's conception warranted. Subtlety of decadence was hardly in his line, nor did he quite perceive the fineness of spirit that penetrates through failure and foulness to the essential understanding; on the technical side, Geoffrey put it, he didn't drawl enough. But Elleray, like all fine actors, was an instinctive opportunist, and Geoffrey could see with half an eye how he would make the thing go. Indeed, Elleray had begun to perceive this himself, and lamentations pointing to abandonment of the part changed insensibly to an heroic intention to endure the burden to the end.

"I do hope they'll do it well," said Mary. She would have said that she hoped it would succeed, but that this might have been taken to suggest some doubt of him; failure, she would imply, could only be from lapses of the actors or stupidity in the public. And Geoffrey, in a revulsion of self-confidence, assured her that the play was "actor-proof"; that positive failure was impossible.

"But good things do fail?" she said, and he knew that she feared his disappointment.

"Not if they're good in the right way," he said, braving platitude, but he added: "Of course, I don't mean that it's going to be a howling success. The point is that these theatrical people don't know their trade. They don't know good from bad and they don't know success from failure—except by results."

"But isn't that the way one does know it?" she said, and "I'm a bit of a pro at this game, Mary," he said. His confidence was surprising.

Still fearing his disappointment, she insinuated a doubt of the repertory theater and its highly respectable audiences. "Don't fear failure for me," he said; "you might as well fear success." And then he quoted:—

> "But, bright God
> O' the lyre what bully-drawlers they applaud."

Quite in high spirits he explained what Meredith meant by bully-drawlers, and he professed himself content to hang back in the race for a time, as Meredith did, knowing that he would come with a rush at the finish. Mary found him delightfully young.

To her surprise he began to talk about Miss Drew; to her surprise because they were both developing self-consciousness in relation to her. He praised her and insinuated that he didn't know much about her. The question of her artistic evolution interested him. Decidedly he was young, thought the experienced

Mary. He mixed up Miss Drew with her profession generally, and talked vague depreciation of it. "They accept American claptrap as though it were Shakespeare," he said, "and when you speak to a woman about color she thinks you mean what she calls art shades." He suggested that the vagabondish still hung about them, that they were naturally isolated, homeless; even that their continual pretenses at humanity left them inhuman. It was an airy performance, and at first Mary found it rather pleasing. It was devised for her reassurance, but he was like a boy accused of being lovelorn who affirms that the lady squints.

And Mary began to despise herself, and even to despise him. What is the good of these stupid concessions of the ultrasympathetic, these despicable agreements with the last comer? Geoffrey wanted to convey to her, no doubt, that he had not gone far with this young lady, that he was alive to the need of caution, that he was no fool. He was kind, but it was not a noble kindness, it was not what she looked for in him. He persisted fatuously and came back to the particular. "Of course she can act," he concluded.

"She is an exquisite creature," Mary flashed out. "You know that she is beautiful."

And he did know it. He looked back along the track he had come and despised himself. Mary spoke again: "You're just trying to please me," she said, "and I'm not as bad as that."

She was heated, indignant; he knew her mood. And

he was angry too, though it was with himself, and only the overflow, the splashes, fell on her. This angry irritation rose up like a flood and swept him away from all chance of full and generous surrender. It was impossible to talk to Mary quite simply about Sibyl, and perhaps Mary could not have talked simply to him when her generous ardor had cooled. The silence that fell between them was heavy with resentment, and yet, perhaps, they had come nearer to an understanding. Geoffrey took his pipe and ruminated in the somber little garden, where the afternoon sun shed chinks or bands of light between the houses. He did some trifling adjustment to bed or walk now and then, and presently, seeing Mary near an open window, he called out some comment on affairs of the garden. She responded evenly, and both were relieved to realize that deeper understanding need not involve immediate explanation. They were shy creatures; it was their way to leave the final words unsaid.

He had declared that Sibyl was loyal, but he had failed miserably in loyalty to her. At least he had failed in the forms of it, and Mary had shattered his flimsy construction. Mary was a gentle, magnanimous, fiery woman; a touchstone for the verities. He found in his heart a dread that somewhere Sibyl might be found wanting; that Mary's sincerity of advocacy might change to a disconcerting sincerity of condemnation. Then the real test of his loyalty might come and he would not be found wanting. But what did this imply? A loyalty to the woman or to his infatuated conception of her? And here he was again disloyal,

he was ready to believe ill of her. Well, the lover is a doubter and a critic; love may pretend to blindness, but it is never blind. He was playing with the idea, of course. There was no question of love, surely. She was romantic, incalculable; very different from Milly Warde. This reflection was prompted by the appearance of Miss Warde, who looked into the garden as she was passing, and halted in a friendly manner when she saw him. There was not much privacy in the Arden's front garden, though they had a precious little bit at the side where they were screened from passers and neighbors, with room at least for a tea-table. It was a good place when the sun blazed, but otherwise too shady or even shivery; they had done their best to bring color into it, to make it something of a bower. Milly had often sat there with them and contributed to the efficiency of the conversation. She looked very neat and perhaps a little tailor-made now, but if her clothes sometimes spoke of the shop, it was a good shop with little or no nonsense about it. Geoffrey had been disposed to tick Milly off, to classify her, but Mary would not have that, and, indeed, her neatnesses were but the barriers about her womanliness. It was one of Geoffrey's objections, that she would have the position defined, and, as she said, "Why shouldn't I?"

A handsome, friendly face should never come amiss, and Milly, if not quite Browning's Pippa, did go about raising people's spirits. It was Mary who had given Geoffrey some idea of the fineness of this in one who had her secret core of melancholy and dis-

couragement. He and Milly were on terms of liking and of badinage, and perhaps their encounters of wits kept them from intimacy. He knew her to be loyal, staunch; she had all that range of honorable virtues, but somehow in her, they were so much a matter of course that they seemed less beautiful than if they had emerged from the doubtful and obscure. How unfair that was! A tithe of her good qualities bedecked alluringly would make a paragon.

Miss Warde looked over the gate and said cheerfully: "Meditating on some gigantic affair of State?" That was the sort of thing she did; that was a characteristic opening. Perhaps "Good-day" would have been better, but the instinct to decorate is commonly too strong. He replied in similar vein and invited her to come in. "On the whole," as she said, she decided to do so because she had been wanting to talk to Mary. So Geoffrey, pursuing the cheerfully facetious vein, called out: "Mary, a person here wants to talk to you," and Mary, recognizing his tone, knew who it was. She came into the garden and was confronted with the downright Milly, who was always welcome. "I've been thinking it over," said Milly, "and I've decided to train for a nurse."

It was sudden, but they were accustomed to suddenness from her. It appeared that she was walking along the main road on her way to the fishmonger and considering whether to get cod steak, which her father liked but which they had had often lately, or mackerel, which he tolerated "as a change," when it struck her that she would positively become a nurse.

She ordered mackerel, this being slightly the more austere proceeding, and then turned down Grayling Street to think about Mary. "I wasn't sure that I should come in," she said, "but I saw Geoffrey hard at work in the garden and I knew he required a rest."

"But how can you decide like that?" said Mary.

"It's easier quick than slow," said Milly.

Mary frowned, for these decisions of Milly suggested irreverence for the constituted order of things. She preferred the method of infinite balancings and a sort of conscientious inaction. And now she dreaded what Milly would say next, for this was likely to involve her. There was no escape. "Now, Mary," said the downright one, "it's time for you to decide." Poor Mary was not ready for anything of the kind. Milly's decision made a new situation, and she wanted to consider it quietly and exhaustively, and certainly she didn't want to talk of it now with Geoffrey or before him.

"To decide what?" said Geoffrey.

And then it all came out. Milly was explicit and Mary was qualified. Milly was the coach and Mary the brake. The question as it affected Geoffrey was no less than whether Mary should leave him and set off with Milly to be a nurse. He was a little startled to find that they had talked about it and that Mary had at least considered the possibility. The instinctive feeling of the pampered male was dismissed very soon. There must be no question of desertion or disloyalty; Mary was free to pursue her vocation. And his spirit was touched with a curious lightness and freedom;

his mind shot suddenly to Sibyl Drew, but he shrank from definitions. "Going to desert me, Mary?" he said lightly, kindly.

It was a considered speech, but Mary was incapable of taking it at its value. The form of words carried a meaning that probed her heart. Was she disloyal? Was she thinking of herself? Of course she was, for she claimed her right to consideration and would have repelled as indignantly any attempt of Geoffrey to take more than a fair share of her life, as she would a suggestion that he was capable of it. But he was important in her eyes, and keeping house for him was consequently important. The wish to become a nurse was an inextricable mixture of conscience, sympathy, and adventurousness, and the whole of these would not have been enough in themselves to move her.

Geoffrey's question brought stammered disclaimers, a plea for the postponement of explanations. But the good, frank Milly would not let it rest there and soon made the crooked plain. "You see, Geoffrey," she said, "Mary and I have taken the liberty of talking about you, and considering what's best for you."

"Bless your hearts!" he said.

"And Mary has got the notion that if she goes on much longer she'll become a fixture."

"But why shouldn't she be a fixture?" he said.

"Ah! but think of all the unhappy young men whose sisters have stuck to them till they were hopeless old bachelors! The kind, considerate brother, the ageing sister, and the marriageable young woman pin-

ing in obscurity. Mary thinks it's your destiny to marry, and wants you to have all the joys of life. She might be in the way."

"But," said Geoffrey, "wouldn't it be as well to wait till this marriageable young woman is in sight?"

"That," said Milly, "is a matter of detail."

"You don't give the cook notice till you've got another one."

"No, but the cook gives you notice if she thinks you may give it her."

"I shall give up analogies," said Geoffrey.

To Mary it was distressing that the discussion should remain on a semi-facetious level. It was not wanting in essentials, but Geoffrey was almost as anxious as she to defer any talk that might tend to development. Their association, their companionship was yet something of rare value and Milly was a disturbing, even a shattering, friend. She was partly conscious of this: "I know I'm a bull in a china shop," she said.

"The only live thing there," said Geoffrey.

Mary proposed that they should all go in and have tea, but Milly wished to be at home when the mackerel arrived, fearing that injudicious storage even for the few hours before dinner might turn it into a legitimate grievance in this weather; perhaps neither Mary nor Geoffrey was sorry that she should go. Before she did so she broached the subject of *Alice Dean* with friendly, pertinent questions, and said she meant to be there on the first night. Mary looked at Geoffrey and he responded amiably by suggesting that Milly

should go with them. It was rather good of him for he wasn't quite sure that he wanted it. However, she accepted, so to speak, with both hands and with cries of delight. "I shall go home shouting 'In a Box—With the Author,'" she said, and it was hardly incredible. And yet she was not inadequate as Mary's friend. She was a good fellow, a good girl, no fool, and she had her discretions. It appeared that she also hadn't them. "I hear that Miss Drew's awfully good," she said. "What do you think of her, Geoffrey? What's she like? Been here, hasn't she? Nice?"

He gave Miss Drew quite a nice character and kept very cool over it. She was at the back of Mary's mind and it made a difference in what she thought about the nursing project. She was conscious that it had become slightly less desirable than when Milly had first spoken of it to her, and this was unfair to Geoffrey and to any one or every one. It was extremely desirable in the general that Geoffrey should marry happily, but it became difficult in the particular. She was willing in a deep, indefinable way that he should marry Milly, but perhaps this was because she knew or thought she knew that he would not marry her. And if he did Mary might not lose him entirely. She was boggling over the loyalties again, for it was in her mind that it wasn't fair to Milly to think of her as just a jolly mate for Geoffrey, while she herself would have all she wanted of the deep communions or the chances of them. But Milly would not be so dangerous as others. Such thoughts could hardly be formulated and they were almost like a

mediæval tempting of the devil, though now he is wily enough to confuse the issue and prepare special baits for the magnanimous. It wanted Milly to define all these things, to measure them or even to acknowledge them. Mary must be fair to herself, she must not sacrifice herself to Geoffrey's slothful ease; but neither must she hamper him by filling the place a wife should take. She must protect him from the sirens, but a really charming and virtuous siren cannot fairly be discouraged, even though she should threaten to take him body and soul.

CHAPTER VI

PERFORMANCE

THERE may be sensitive souls or super-egoists who dread the first performances of their plays, but Geoffrey was normal enough to look forward to his ordeal with very pleasant excitement. He had seen the dress rehearsal, which was both prolonged and sketchy, and had received the usual assurance that raggedness on the eve meant smoothness on the day. But he was hardly prepared to find the gaps closed, the crooked made straight in such a generally plausible performance as the actors achieved. Repertory theater plays may be deplorably under-rehearsed, but when it seems impossible that they should hold together, these professional actors achieve wonders, if not perfection.

The Ardens made a mild little jollity of it, and, with Milly Warde, dined in the hotel restaurant and quite in the public eye, for there must have been half a dozen people there who knew them, and what they were after. They had a bottle of not too expensive fizzy wine, so that, if it wasn't quite what might be expected of the Pineros and Barries before their West End successes, it was festive in a modest way. Geoffrey enjoyed it, with just a slight reserve of irony, Mary was happy and anxious, and Milly as

jolly as a sandboy. His austere labor was over, in some degree its value was presently to be assayed, and now came this irrelevance of festivity like a feast on a holy day. Geoffrey maintained his confidence and seemed to have no apprehension of failure, though he professed to be greatly interested in the degrees and kinds of success. Milly was more overwhelmingly confident, though she knew nothing of the play, and Mary alone represented apprehensions and forebodings while she tried to subdue them. Two or three people came up to speak to them—Bonsor vaguely aggressive and Imalian inscrutably polite. They were going to the play and they braced Geoffrey, for, while in his own small circle he was assured of eager or sympathetic advocacy, he knew that the men of the world would be ready enough to turn down their thumbs. Bonsor was capable of catching the sentiment of the crowd, and Imalian, Geoffrey knew, was a stern critic. What he most cared about was the verdict of Secretan, who was writing the notice for the *Herald*. There he might fail. That delicate, implacable critic could not be circumvented.

A little circle gathered round them in the so-called garden where they took their coffee. The genial Burke came up to tell them that he was prepared to make terms for a *claque,* and that his hands were hard and ready for the work. Attar, one of the wits of the *Herald,* said something about the itching palm. It appeared that relays of the staff might turn up at the theater during the evening. It was all friendly,

stimulating, rather frothy. You cannot settle down to anything in the ten minutes preceding an event. Imalian remained calm, though he attempted a little courteous agitation. Attar begged him to reveal what the future held and they all paused to look at the deep, dark, oracular young man who smiled indulgently. The time approached, and Burke's friendly excitement grew a trifle excessive; he was no longer the calm Irishman. He proposed to carry Geoffrey shoulder-high across the street to the theater. "Splendid advertisement," he said. He offered to fight Geoffrey three rounds under the Marquis of Queensberry's rules, just to get the people together. Bonsor tried to frown him down, but might as well have tried to reason with a champagne cork. However, time was up and they all rose together and went across to the theater in an animated little mob.

Behind the curtain of the box, Geoffrey looked out on a fairish house which bespoke hardly more than a languid interest in his play. He did not escape some obvious reflections of a sub-acid, "prophet without honor in his own country" kind. Manchester was hardly playing up as an intellectual center, but, indeed, the Playgoers' Theater had made strenuous attempts to escape the stigma of intellectuality. It wanted to be jolly and first-rate. It had not succeeded in catching even the fringe of the Manchester that aped the London social fashions, but some nucleus of a faithful, uncritical, doggedly self-improving audience had been got together. On occasion it was reinforced by other elements, though to-night it wanted a considera-

ble spur to the imagination to conceive it as seething with the excitement due to the birth or revelation of a masterpiece. Anyhow, they were excited enough in the box, and if stalls and pit were hardly of the great world they might be taken as a sort of stage crowd contributing to an effect.

After an artistic little curtain-raiser, which, as Milly said, was "neither here nor there," the curtain rose on *Alice Dean,* and Geoffrey quickened to attention. At first the play seemed to go confusingly fast, and all sorts of deliberate intentions were slurred over and lost. Geoffrey made rapid progress in the technique of play-writing in the first ten minutes; he perceived that at the start an audience's mind is all astray and groping for the tangibilities; that subtlety is wasted; and, presently, that when the mind grips the theme it misses little, though it may misapprehend much. Repertory theater actors have many first nights, but they do not escape the first night shakiness and queer gaps in the smoothness of performance revealed a perturbed humanity. A slip by Elleray made a passage utterly unintelligible, and Geoffrey groaned and chafed, but Elleray had taken hold of the play and began to feel his power. Indeed, it was evident to Geoffrey that he conceived the situation as one to be saved by heroic effort. Actors like to "pull the play out of the fire," and Elleray made efforts which to Geoffrey's mind were excessive. He acted brilliantly and became domineering and decisive except, indeed, when he forgot his part. He was certainly making the play go, but it became evident even to himself

that stimulants were unnecessary. The play was established, and Elleray began to act with more of refinement and ease.

Sibyl's early appearances had none of the acting chances that the profession loves, but in the first act there is a sudden spurt of emotion which came thrillingly. In the rehearsal she had sometimes seemed to make the part big and emphatic, but now it was quiet and subdued. She had eliminated all irrelevant effectiveness, and, indeed, Geoffrey thought that she might have claimed to be the loyal interpreter of his bare intentions. And yet the personal element remained over; everything she did or said was peculiar to her. There are many competent actors in the world, but Geoffrey had got to the point at which competent acting in itself is a bore. Acting may be the valuable medium for the play, and it may be, too, an exhibition of charm or personality. Geoffrey experienced a faint, almost pleasurable whiff of the old jealousy; he peered out at the set faces in the house and wondered what share was his in their attention. And then he looked at Mary and Milly, and it seemed that they were intent on Sibyl, that they, at least, were not thinking of the play. He was conscious of contending femininities, though presumably the appreciation was generous enough. Milly's "wonderful" and "superb" hardly seemed beyond the occasion, though they were not precisely chosen. He was proud at heart and justified in Sibyl. The act concluded with a recovery of the minor key after bravura passages. He had prided himself on this, and she accomplished it

so exquisitely that even his final impression was of her. The play came second.

The curtain fell to heartening applause, not quite vociferous, but extended beyond the merely respectful. The curtain bounced up two or three times and the actors stood there relaxed into a beaming complacency. Geoffrey saw Sibyl's eyes turn toward their box, and as the lights in the auditorium had gone up he thought she might see his gesture of applause. But she turned away calmly and, as it might be, sadly. He saw her then as the artist immersed in her work and tolerating this vulgar clamor of approval. She was not one of the smirkers who posture before an audience like grateful shop-walkers.

They had a little crowd in the box during the interval, and there was quite a jabber of excited talk. Geoffrey breathed more deeply and easily, knowing that the *cognoscenti* were on his side. Imalian said little, but when Milly pressed him for the explicit he said: "The question is whether he can keep it up." Attar brought word of something that Secretan had said, and if the great Secretan had said that Geoffrey had not lived in vain. Opinions differed, it seemed, about Elleray's performance, but not about Miss Drew's. Geoffrey overheard Mary's warm praise of her. He was exultant behind a modest demeanor. When the men had cleared away, Mary and Geoffrey had a shy word together, and Milly's heartiness encompassed them reassuringly. Behind the curtain in a theater box is a queer, snug, stuffy place, but it is possible to be happy there. The time went fast.

"Any one can write a first act," Secretan had once said, and Geoffrey remembered this at the beginning of his second. He had some anxious minutes, but the play picked itself up as he knew it would, and presently all apprehensions had vanished. Whatever might be the quality of the play, it appeared that he had that sense of the theater without which dramatic genius must dissipate itself in literature. He was intent on the play, and at times the performance was secondary; at times there was almost a clear distinction between the two. There came a phase of exultant egoism during which he had the illusion of power. The play was going well with the audience, but not as well as it went in his mind, stimulated as he was by the obvious success. Now and then he was touched by Sibyl and grateful to her, and yet, again, he lost consciousness of any personal relation. He enjoyed the applause as a schoolboy would, while at the back of his mind there was some reservation; this applause was a gross summing-up of dubious, confused impressions; it was largely irrelevant.

Yet there it was, and when the curtain fell on the last act the clamor had a fairly hearty note in it. Geoffrey was cool enough to measure his success, and he knew that the motions of the audience were not all one way; there was not the even roar of applause that comes of perfect comprehension and intense stimulation. In the box, however, life was at high pressure, and it was Geoffrey's joy to look into Mary's shining eyes. People were shouting "Author" rather mechanically, and an eager manager hustled him out

of the box. It appeared that there was not a way to the stage on this side of the house, and Geoffrey was hurried along the back of the circle. It was crowded, and his progress was not dignified. He bumped into Burke, whose stentorian voice seemed to dominate the applause, and Burke's astonishment to find him there struck Geoffrey as exquisitely funny. After moments of darkness and intricacy he emerged upon the stage, and it seemed that he was passed from hand to hand till he stood in the center of a line of actors. Sibyl, or some queer caricature of Sibyl, was beside him, and Elleray, on the other side, gave him a heightened smile of encouragement. The curtain went up and he was propelled a little to the front of the others. He bowed and, unaccustomed to doing it on this scale, he feared that it had been too much of a bend and a duck. The thinning audience emitted a few "Bravos"—Geoffrey distinctly heard Burke's note—the clapping was renewed and the curtain fell.

Geoffrey was surrounded by congratulations, and, again, he measured them instinctively. He had succeeded, but he hadn't set the Thames on fire; perhaps the actors had not yet adjusted their anticipations of failure, to this very respectable measure of success. Upjohn made rather a handsome, formal little speech, and Elleray said they all knew that Geoffrey had it in him. Geoffrey did not quite understand what this meant, but he made cordial acknowledgments to the actors, who rapidly dispersed to their dressing-rooms. He was amused at Elleray's "told you it would be

all right" air, but he was far enough now from feeling any resentment, and certainly Elleray had done wonders; he had made a sort of popular success of an unpopular part.

With a gentle "Good-night" and a little bow, Sibyl was leaving him, having stayed to the last, but he couldn't have that. The strength of his impulse overpowered the remnants of his shyness, and perhaps of hers, and he seized her hands. He stammered words of praise that were of a quite uncritical enthusiasm. Her face was strange and garish, but he looked into her eyes. Her beautiful lineaments seemed heightened and florid; the painted face was a doll's, but it was Sibyl's too. She was an exquisite creature rudely daubed, a virgin goddess coarsely baited; to yield to this lure was surely the way of life and honor. He pressed her hands with the ardor of a lover, but they were not alone; he was held back by the presence of scene-shifters, by the scruples of one who had learnt to school impulse, by the cowardly punctilios. If it was to be, it could not be now. He descended to a mere geniality and she became positively cheerful. They exchanged the commonplaces of the situation, and parted with emphatic friendliness.

And then he lost his way, and, stumbling about dim passages, he had a glimpse of her again. She was shutting a door when she saw him and she emerged. Quite naturally she took his hand to guide him through dim obstructions. He held it gently, but when she indicated his safe direction he bent to kiss it. And then he said: "A thousand thanks."

She disengaged herself and retired with another low "Good-night." As he made his way to where Mary and Milly awaited him, he reflected, with mixed emotions, that his words had been an enormous subtraction from the deed. To kiss her hand was much, but he had given her to understand that he was thanking her for her very admirable performance. Of course, he had not meant that. He had kissed her tenderly, impulsively, and then the words were a sort of cautious withdrawal. They must have been so, and yet he did utter them sincerely. He began to feel the need of some clear thinking on her behalf and his own.

He found his friends slightly impatient, and explained gaily that he couldn't get away from the actors. They went home royally in a taxi, and he repeated things that Upjohn and Elleray had said. "But what did Miss Drew say?" asked Milly, and declared her to be perfectly delightful. Geoffrey frowned secretly, and said that it was curious to see her face all plastered with paint. He propounded the theory —theatrically heterodox—that make-up should be abandoned or only symbolical vestiges of it retained. Rather boldly—for he was conscious of Mary—he said that it was a shame to overlay such an exquisite medium as Miss Drew's face. It was bold, and yet he was conscious of the attempt to lead Mary astray. It was instinctive, protective, and, he felt, despicable. He couldn't make up his mind, and so he was induced to these ridiculous subterfuges.

Instead of discussing the performance, as natural inclination should have made him, Geoffrey began to

talk about technical points which could very well have waited. He even imported some of his excitement into the question, whether at the theater people should use opera glasses, and he condemned the practice. "But," said Milly, "how are we to see what that exquisite medium is doing, without?" He said that you could always go to the front row of the stalls if you wanted to—"We couldn't all," interjected Milly—but it appeared that he strongly condemned the front row too. "Well, then," said Milly, in the tone you use to a wayward child, and he then explained that facial expression on the stage did not matter; that it could only tell by being exaggerated out of nature, and that it was the figure, the pose, the gesture that did matter.

"In that case," said Milly, "Miss Drew's face doesn't matter."

"Not to you, perhaps," he said, "but it does to me."

"Then," persisted she, "when you talked about an exquisite medium you didn't mean for acting."

"Not a bit of it," he said brazenly. But he had the happy inspiration to put things right, or nearly so, with a laugh.

Their talk in the taxi had a false air of the confidential, and when they got home they didn't go very deep into things. Milly came in to supper, of course, and various men dropped in and were induced to eat and drink unceremoniously. It was all very jolly, and they kept it up late; so late that Round called in, seeing the lights, and reported that he had failed to induce Secretan to come with him—"Though," he

added, " he's all right. Don't fear." The great Round, illustrious journalist, brilliant scholar, genial wit, settled down to cold pie and claret in the small hours, with a superb air of banqueting. He wouldn't let Milly go or Mary talk of bedtime, and, whether he said incisive things about the Greek drama, which made Geoffrey feel small, or things of mere merriment and gusto, he was a critic and a leader of men. There was a half-jocular discussion about Geoffrey's future, and whether he should " chuck " the *Herald* and make thousands a year by his plays; but " Why the future? Why the future? " cried Round. " Take the present with both hands. To-morrow we die. It's glorious now. What more do you want? "

There was genuine impatience in his voice, and Geoffrey could believe that he spoke the words of wisdom. This play of his did give them a jolly occasion, but as a draft upon the future, what chance had it of being honored? He was not the prey of illusions. And yet, with something between wistfulness and resentment, he could have wished that Round might have a living interest in his affairs. Round played a genial part in the chorus of adulation, and yet it was unlikely that he would ever go to the play. He would neither avoid it nor seek it; he was generous and indifferent; he had big things of his own to think about and was ready to agree courteously that the affairs of others might be big too! Mary was puzzled by him, but his benevolence was overwhelming, and it enveloped Geoffrey if it was not concentrated on him. She was in uncommonly high

spirits and kindled charmingly. Geoffrey felt that the barriers between them were down, that misunderstandings and reticence were overcome. And yet, when the others were gone, though they were gentle and kind to one another, they were shy.

With the morning came the papers, and particularly Secretan's notice. It seemed to temper the critic's austerity with the comrade's warmth, and Geoffrey found it almost startling; he felt like one who had been assigned a post of grave responsibility. Mary knitted her brows over the qualifications in the article, but on the whole she decided to approve. "You see," said Geoffrey, "he takes me seriously, and that's all that's wanted. One only asks that." To Mary it seemed that this was hardly enough, but she acquiesced. After all, it was something of a relief, for it would have been awful if Mr. Secretan hadn't liked Geoffrey's play. And her scrupulousness was placated. "He must mean what he says, because he doesn't just praise you." She did not like these qualifications, and yet if Secretan's notice had been a conscientious condemnation, she would have honored him for it.

For the next few days Geoffrey felt as though he were living in a shop window. He was uneasily expectant that people would speak to him about *Alice Dean,* and some did, but surprisingly many either knew nothing about it, or avoided the subject because they had no intention of going to the play. He realized that the production of *Alice Dean* was not half such a big event as he had felt it to be, and he was slightly disconcerted to find that his importance in

the scheme of things was not materially increased. Fortunately, he could laugh at this, though Mary could imitate him only with difficulty, and her gentleness was vexed by the coolness of acquaintances. These commonly conceived the theater in terms of Sir George Alexander and the West End, and it was notorious that trousers imperfectly creased had been seen at the Playgoers' Theater. Admittedly this was a failure in technique and could not be mitigated by mere strenuousness after the ideal. However, people went to see *Alice Dean,* and it had a certain vogue; as a local attempt it was not so bad, though it was understood that these *Herald* people take themselves too seriously, and constitute a sort of mutual admiration society. Besides, such plays as *Alice Dean,* clever as they are, miss the broad, human touch; "a man who would dissect his mother," was the verdict of one sentimentalist.

Authors have a way of sneaking in to see how their plays are getting on, and Geoffrey saw his, or parts of it, several times in the course of the week. There was a good deal of underlining, and Geoffrey made some effort to curb the exuberance of his actors. It could only be done by definite excisions, and he had the satisfaction to eliminate the biggest laugh the play afforded. This came from what seemed to him an innocent line, but the audience strained it to the point of lewdness. Geoffrey felt that he was in danger of becoming scornful of his audience. His problem, he knew, was to keep touch with the vulgar humor and yet be as fine as God and the theater would let

him be. To accept the conventions and to put your life into them is the formula.

So *Alice Dean* ran its week and disappeared. Even while it was on, Sibyl Drew was rehearsing a fresh part and conning another. Elleray confided to Geoffrey that if he could play the part in London the future was theirs. And, remembering what Elleray used to think of the part, Geoffrey felt that he had accomplished something.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO WORLDS

GEOFFREY soon discovered that *Alice Dean* had not advanced him far in what some of his friends would call his practical career. It had not made a profound impression on the general consciousness, but when people met him they inquired encouragingly whether he had got "anything on the stocks?" It was not a very difficult question to parry, and he found himself extremely unwilling to discuss his work with genial people who had no interest in it. He was ready to talk to Imalian and one or two more about it, but even with them he was shy until the subject was fairly launched. He was secretly curious to know more of what Mary thought. Among their friends it seemed to be taken that he had had a success. "You will go far," said one well-meaning acquaintance, and then—"anything on the stocks?" They will not let you rest. Everything that is done is thrust hastily behind and you are incited to fresh efforts. Geoffrey's novel was almost forgotten; his play—well, a rocket has very much the same life as a squib. Hot and hot come the books from the press, but old Victorians continue to occupy the niches in the classical temple.

Geoffrey felt his strength or some illusion of

strength, and yet to strive with the mighty is to fail; to be humble is to court failure. When he talked to Mary he could see his work as a spiritual experience; but he went out into the world and found himself in a jostling, striving throng. He sat at his desk pursuing the idea faithfully, and then he mixed in the chatter about publishers and managers. He was in love with austerity, but he had his light o' loves too. Every man has his crude ambitions, and Geoffrey, too, wanted to ride on the top of the wave. He had enjoyed the agitations of the play-producing, and he could have said to himself, "Here, at last, is life." Life is the fresh experience. But life, he knew, was in the hours of patient effort; so patient and so arduous that it seemed a vanity to wish to be other than he was, to strive to penetrate to what was remote from his natural mood. Yet sometimes this effort left on his work the mark of the over-laborious; sometimes, he hoped, he could even believe, that the moment of inspiration, the fullness of life came through endeavor.

He turned to the routine of his work on the *Herald,* feeling that he could perform it well and cheerfully while the possibilities of this deeper experience lay before him. He enjoyed friendly wrangles with Burke, who assured him that the arts were good if you kept in the middle of the stream, but that he was far more likely to find himself in a backwater; and with Attar, who gave a more polished version of the case for opportunism. Attar looked upon these repertory theaters and limited editions with kindly indulgence,

and if you talked of pioneers he would ask whether you would choose to be Marlowe or Shakespeare, John the Baptist or Christ. The cool Attar even championed the side of heart versus brain, he exalted emotion over thought, the notion being that the crank is always the victim of his idea, while feeling will keep you in the center of things; cranks notorious for excess of feeling were dismissed as impostors.

And life—Geoffrey was still young enough to think about "life," or at least to talk about it—life, he was ready to maintain, is what you feel and think, not what you do. The philosopher might press you for distinctions, and the truth was that Geoffrey was in love with art. "We are civilized beings," he would say, and there is no need for us to seek for experiences in the center of Africa or at the North Pole; others can do this for us and give us the idea of it." Perhaps there was some bitterness in this; he knew that he was missing something; the renunciation had more than a touch of the supercilious. A young man should fall in love with his thews and his nerves. You can have athletics, of course, you can stand up to fast bowling, you can go rock-climbing, you can swim in the sea; or you may dismiss these as trifles and conceive yourself as a disembodied spirit.

His play had brought him something of the exaltation of accomplishment and this persisted fitfully. He thought that every one should be an artist, that the best of life is to play at life; politics, he would say, are a mere policing to that end. Meeting Brecher one

day in the corridor at the office, he fell into a half-earnest, half-ironical discussion with him. Brecher, a Jew intent on Zionism, spared for the world of Gentiles an efficient and generally contemptuous service. Attar had described him as a machine invented to save humanity, and certainly his services were performed with a minimum of the sentiments. He scorned the dilettante, and perhaps made no clear distinction between that and the artist. He had his reserves; his pride of race, his pride of exclusiveness; he had once told Geoffrey that never, in any circumstances, could he marry outside his race, and a chill mist seemed to rise between them. Geoffrey had it in his mind to say: "You can have no friend but a Jew?" but he hesitated as at something irrevocable; he did not like to think that with Brecher, friendship was impossible, that he must stop short at admiration. He had put it to him that love bloweth where it listeth, that passion will have its way, and that some fair young Englishwoman might capture the Jew's heart. Brecher had stared at him incredulously. And, indeed, Geoffrey presently put it to himself whether, in any circumstances, he himself would be likely to marry a foreign woman. It was only a formal liberalism that could make it seem possible.

And now he tried to explain something of his newfound consciousness of art to Brecher, who listened to him but stonily. Brecher was a politician, immersed in the struggle, and it seemed impertinent to ask him to see both sides beautifully when one of them was wrong. That your love of humanity should make

you accept a brutishly stupid humanity, and write pretty tales or draw pretty pictures of it while great work was to be done, seemed frivolous to Brecher. He might agree that these frivolities are inevitable and that if they are done they should be well done. And Brecher could crack a joke with anybody; he was a rather jovial person when he unbent from his austere labors, but he really must part company if you wanted him to regard joking—or anything of the sort—as a man's work. Geoffrey tried to give him his conception of the " open door " of art—Brecher became suddenly solemn at the phrase familiar in current economics—and Brecher agreed that open doors were good, that if art had a common language which made people understand one another and live in peace, it was very much to the good, but you must not mistake a means for an end. And then Geoffrey asked him what the end was; what was to be done when the world was straightened up and the Jews were flourishing in Palestine; might they take to art then? Brecher's far-away look, as of one intent on something at the horizon made Geoffrey feel frivolous indeed. " That is for those who follow," said Brecher. Geoffrey hinted at compromise—should not your life have all the elements—adventure, service, art? Brecher had lost interest in the discussion.

Geoffrey went away feeling rather uncomfortable, like that young man with great possessions, for he felt himself to be up against something too explicit and austere for him. He had a natural turn for comfort, and Brecher was one of those who could work

in a cold room. Yet Geoffrey was not a man to acquiesce in moral inferiority; always he had responded to ideals of devotion. You may devote yourself to art, but this art of the theater is queerly confounded with the florid successes and mere jollities. Perhaps in his self-communings he did himself less than justice, but he had his secret grim little satisfactions when publishers wrote to him about his novels in the vein of polite, respectful, cautious remonstrance. He was on the border line. They couldn't make out whether, in rebuffing him, they ran the chance of missing something, and yet they feared to commit themselves to him. An innocent attempt at the personal relation—to find the man behind the firm—had been received freezingly, and yet, it seemed, there was anxiety not to sever relations; your publisher is haunted by the idea that he may turn away a disguised angel from his door. An agent to whom he had sent *Alice Dean* assured him that he was one of the first dramatists of his time, and that all he needed was a collaborator of less lofty aims; there was even an offer to provide one. It was a delightful letter for one with a fund of hidden egoism to receive, but it was stupid, or seemed so, for Geoffrey always made a clear distinction between his novels and his plays; the novels were for a patient, intimate minority, the plays for any one awake. And, indeed, to the novelist play-writing may look an easy road to fame and fortune. "I'll grant you," said the shrewd Attar, smoking a friendly pipe in Geoffrey's room one afternoon, "that the play-writers are mostly duffers, but they

know the game." "And why shouldn't a genius like me learn it?" said Geoffrey. "Because it's a duffer's game," said the cynic. "You've got to unlearn being an austere genius."

"But what about——"

"Damn Shakespeare. Shakespeare's barred."

Geoffrey had the dream that he might accomplish the miracle of reconciliation. Surely, he thought, it is possible to found all the beauties—or a sufficiency of them—on a popular appeal, to make a work of fine intention go with a roar. "Take a house," he said, "the most beautiful and original house is the best to live in. And it remains so when you've decorated it beautifully."

Attar groaned. "Analogies are barred," he said. "And you know that most people like their houses and everything in them hideous."

"Every art," said Geoffrey, "has its conventional limitations and thrives on them. The sonnet must have fourteen lines. The play must have elements that please a mob."

"You think of a mob as you write your lines?"

"Let's call 'em simple human beings. But you don't exactly think of them. They're there."

"You're an intricate, aloof sort of devil," said Attar. "But cheapen yourself. I dare say it's what you want."

"There's an immense common basis," cried Geoffrey. "Big things might unite us all. A war. Some mighty peril. One is aloof I dare say. Every one should be. You must have a self to go home to."

"And then you dole bits of it out in books?" said Attar.

"And why not? There's lots left."

"Yes," said Attar. "That war would be very interesting. I wonder what we should all do. What would the poor old *Herald* do?"

"You think it impossible?"

"Not a bit."

"There was the Boer War."

"That was a trifle. A pretty big trifle, of course, but it was possible to oppose it and keep on opposing. My God! Arden, think of a big European war, with England struggling for existence and the *Herald* nagging!"

"That's a horrible way of putting it."

"Can't you see it that way?"

"Look here, Attar! I don't run the political side of this paper so I can speak handsomely about it. Suppose we did blunder into a big war, I'd back the old *Herald* against the field for loyalty and competence and common sense; and ideals thrown in, of course."

"Loyalty; yes," said Attar, "but what form would it take?"

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. It was a symbolical gesture, for, certainly, he was not sweating. "Give peace in our time, O Lord!" he said.

"And yet," cried Geoffrey, upon an impulse that mastered him, "are we never to be tried? Are we never to grunt and sweat? Are we never to descend

into hell? I'm peaceful enough, of course, but here I am planning out my life without a kink in it. Never so much cold as over shoes in snow, as old Shakespeare said. Have you read Conrad's *Youth?* Is it good enough to grow up safely in a newspaper office? Oughtn't we to be out enduring and failing, in agony and bloody sweat? Oh, of course, I know there's a fine, quiet austere life to be lived here, and you can polish your style and get rhythm into your prose and all that. And you can give a hand to remedial legislation. Remedial legislation! Eh? We're missing something."

Attar said: "Do you want us to get up a European war for you?"

"I'm irresponsible," said Geoffrey. "I'm not a publicist, and so I can have a private life without treachery. I can backslide with impunity."

"You're a Prussian militarist in private?"

"No. I want it an adventure. They want to plan it all as a certainty. So folks say. I know nothing about it. I don't know if they exist."

"Well," said Attar, "we may find out that they do exist."

"Do they?" said Geoffrey.

"I'm a skeptic too," said Attar. "You can make out a case for certain war. I can't believe in it. I may be a fool."

"Deuced uncomfortable," said Geoffrey. "I hate it all."

"War's obsolete," said Attar, "and yet—what are we to do? The boldest, bravest thing is to take risks

for peace. To act as though you didn't believe in war——"

"And where are you if it comes?"

"I don't mean that we are to disband our navy. But the courageous thing is not to raise a million men. If the Germans are thinking of war it would start it."

"Then it's the cautious thing."

"Well, the wise thing. It's always brave to be wise."

"Don't you mean it's always wise to be brave?" said Geoffrey.

Attar didn't find this worth replying to, but he began again after a pause. "You may reason about the future or you may feel, which is a sort of subconscious reasoning. I mistrust both, and the future rises up like a wall against me. Every shape is in the block of marble. Menaces are solid and terrific things, and they are lighter than smoke. Perhaps we ought to muster and drill as old Roberts says. He believes it; it's a certainty for him, and to be certain is to be happy."

"No, no," said Geoffrey.

"Perhaps not, but that's how it strikes me."

"A gallant old man preaching to deaf ears while his country rushes to destruction."

"Yes," said Attar. "The fanatics are often right. It's rather jolly to be right."

"You mean to say he would like us to be destroyed?"

"No. Oh, no! But there's some mitigation in

being right. I can never be right because I'm inveterately skeptical. One conforms sometimes and shouts with the rest."

"Look here," said Geoffrey; "if Germany got going with France and Russia, should we come in?"

"Are you asking me—or a leader-writer on the *Herald?*"

"It's the same thing."

"Thank you, Arden. Yes, I think I'm loyal. I'm even correct. But sometimes when you can't see things, you can see a cherub who sees them. And a cherub isn't evidence."

"Well?"

"There's a mad devil in the sanest of us. There's a point at which you must join in a row."

"And we couldn't see France bleed to death."

"Arden," said Attar, "there's something in your idea of the adventure. And think of us here. Even here. Think of Round writing on the great European War. And Brecher, the clear head in a muddle of finance, proving everybody bloody fools. And Secretan! Secretan with a theme like that! You'd see what a live thing style is. In justice to our colleagues we ought to foment a quarrel."

"And Lindsay?"

"Lindsay is us all, and we are all Lindsay."

"And where would remedial legislation be? Who would look after the virtuous poor in Ancoats?"

"I don't laugh, Arden, I can't see the joke."

"It would be tragedy for Lindsay."

"He can support tragedy."

"Yes, but what did you say about a big war and the *Herald* nagging?"

"That was unworthy. It was as a flicker of nightmare. We're bigger than that."

"But we've a faith to keep with these Ancoats people."

"Yes, it'll have to be a damned good war for us to back it."

They parted with a nod, and Geoffrey found himself thinking about practical problems that might arise. His thoughts shaped themselves into attitudes of defense. If war came there would be a howl of execration against the *Herald* and their policy, which was so much bolder than it looked. The alternative was the feverish equipment of a few hundred thousand men, which would not necessarily be accompanied by any clear thinking on foreign policy. And, of course, you cannot be safe. Safety is not one of the conditions of live men or nations. The alarmists may be right, and, indeed, unless the age of peace has come they must be right some day. There was a time when war with France was proclaimed to be inevitable; then it was Russia; now Germany. The point is that we must be ready, but not too ready. And you can get into a frame of mind in which all our vast preparations are as nothing; it is only the additional Dreadnought or the fifty thousand men in dispute that count.

War? What is war? Can humanity stand it on a great scale? Wouldn't the monstrous absurdity of it force a hurried peace? We talk glibly of war, and here and there on the map the nations have slaughtered

and haven't known how to leave off slaughtering. Geoffrey hadn't thought out his principles, and he had a vague belief that they had something to do with Tolstoy and Christ. An infusion of these, at least, but Mary had once said "An infusion? You are always for an infusion. Take it pure. Take it altogether." But he had a hard residuum of common sense and Mary hadn't; she could exist on the spirit alone. He would take the middle way, hating middle ways and declaring that extremes were best. He was uneasy when he thought of Mary and himself with war for a third. And still in his enthusiasm for art he was ready to think of that as a solvent, an infallible touchstone. He was ready to grapple with the greatest conceivable tragedy.

It chanced that he passed the Playgoers' Theater, a commonplace enough structure but with associations, speaking to him already of memories. It had a disused, irrelevant look in the daylight, and even at night its brilliances were rather dingy. He stood looking at it, as Rachel, in Matthew Arnold's sonnet, looked at the grandiose façade of the temple of her spirit. Was this his life? This sort of thing? The difference between him and Rachel was considerable; between the historic French theater and this provincial temple of the mediocritics, inconsiderable. He could idealize it but was it good enough on any terms? This talk with Attar had been disturbing. *Alice Dean* seemed shrunken and far away, and represented something cold and dim in experience. It had been evolved very much from his own consciousness, though a waitress

in a tea-shop had served for a model; she had disturbed the impression whenever she spoke. He had poured into her what he knew of women—parts of Mary, Milly, various book learning. And the man had been himself but for the grace of God; himself pulled about fantastically. Our modern villains are ourselves in apprehension or in irony. He had felt the need of an ideal world, and the theater had helped him to feel things intensely, to see them beautifully. He had thought that he might bring life to the old thing and carry on its great, degraded traditions. He could accomplish the miracle of reconciliation; he could find beauty in strange places. And what an opportunity! The number of good novelists at work is disconcerting to any one who looks for eminence in that line, but the play-writers that the ardent young man thinks worth consideration may almost be told on the fingers of one hand. "Among the blind the one-eyed man is king," Attar had said when this point was suggested. It made Geoffrey feel a mean pretender. And was this sham world his real one? Was he still to live the placid, sedentary life of the body and justify it with the high adventures of the mind? He had had the grace to be made uncomfortable by the incitements of Wells to an active citizenship, and when he read a Kipling story about some man "sticking it" in a remote, impossible Indian hill station, reproachful voices would call to him. And yet he would always rebel against the crude exigencies of war. He idealized himself as a specialist in fine relations and could feel some impatience at being

called upon to consider these simple, primitive questions of national safety. "War!" he said to himself. "But if we are coarsened we are beaten." He wished he had thought of this while Attar was there.

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMER

THE Archduke was murdered on June 28th, but it has not been our way in these islands to bother much about murders in Eastern Europe. Of course we are accustomed to platitudes about the Balkans being a hotbed of unrest, but they can accomplish a good deal of that without much obvious harm to us. Mr. Chesterton (or was it Mr. Belloc?) once said something funny about the first man to declare that the death of Francis Joseph would be the signal for upheaval in Europe, but that tough old gentleman had lived so long and upheavals in the future are so innocuous that we didn't trouble about it. Meeting Attar again in the corridor, Geoffrey had said: "Well, is your way any nearer?" Round joined them, and they discussed things in a desultory way and with quiet minds. Geoffrey suggested that there was an immense solidity and assurance about things, even Eastern Europe things. The others agreed without enthusiasm, and Round said, "Like the rickyard before the tramp lights his pipe there." He agreed that it was not a complete analogy.

It was summer, and Geoffrey sweated over his games, and meditated occasionally on the embryo of a masterpiece. Suddenly there came Austria's ulti-

matum to Serbia, and Russia's decision to resist. Everybody told everybody that it was mighty serious, but few felt it to be so. The nearer war came, the more unlikely it looked. Geoffrey had a pleasant Saturday afternoon at his suburban lawn tennis club, and the intervals between the sets were spent in mutual assurances that it was absurd and impossible. Indeed, the topic was exhausted presently, for most people were too shaky in their foreign politics to continue. Plans for the autumn holiday were not interrupted, and the neighborly contacts were reassuring. Tea, gay chatter, white flannel, the flying balls, the struggle for trivial masteries; it was all reassuring. Those nice people the Wibberleys, told Geoffrey that they were going to Grasmere for the Bank Holiday week-end, and that Miss Sibyl Drew would accompany them. The Playgoers' season was over, and, though there was the prospect of hot and tiresome weeks at Blackpool and elsewhere for the poor, exhausted actors, some respite was granted. Mrs. Wibberley talked of Sibyl's art, and entangled Geoffrey in a discussion about *Alice Dean.* It was rather pleasant, but he wasn't always quite sure what she meant or whether they were talking of the same thing. As to the prospects, "We cannot go to war," she said with finality.

Suddenly Mrs. Wibberley said: "You want a holiday, Mr. Arden," and it appeared that Geoffrey was meaning to spend the next week-end somewhere in the Lakes. It had just occurred to him, and as he admitted that his plans were not settled and that Gras-

mere always attracted him, the rest was easy. He checked Mrs. Wibberley's tentative invitation to stay with them, dependent as it was on the capacity of beds and the shuffling of the family, and declared firmly for the hotel. Their offers of hospitality were not exhausted, and he explained that he couldn't take all his meals with them because the hotel folk wouldn't stand it—unless, indeed, he had a bottle of champagne every morning for the good of the house. Mrs. Wibberley considered champagne vulgar.

Geoffrey's visit to Grasmere was a sort of failure. Austria was at war with Serbia, Russia was mobilizing, he read the comments on Germany's ultimatum to Russia as he traveled north on the Saturday morning. It was brilliant summer weather, the mountains and lakes called him, and there was another allurement. He was happy and he was deeply disturbed. As he sped on his holiday quest thousands of his fellows were gathering for stern work, all over the world men of action were alert and moving. Right or wrong they were moving while he was gadding about. He looked out of the window and the landscape was familiar. It was the same, and he knew it wasn't the same; it was a monstrous illusion. He shaped grandiose ideas of nature's great treachery which would betray us with a kiss; of placid cattle waiting for their fate in a bloody old world; of death, the grave, and that layer of worms all round the earth and always ready. Far, far away, he and millions like him had a glimpse of the ugly specter waiting at the end of a long road; impelled by passion, honor, and expedi-

ency they would crowd along it together. And so he hastened to his sweetheart in brilliant summer.

The jollities of arrival scattered apprehensions, but these returned. The Wibberleys, with splendid assurance, declared that a general European war simply couldn't be; but they declared it too often. Sibyl had changed. She was gentle with him, she was almost cordial, but he looked into frightened eyes. How far did she see? What did she see? She was sensitive, he knew, but he could have asked her what was wrong and waited for something definite. Mrs. Wibberley told him that the dear thing was run down and had wanted a change badly. She seemed more uneasy about Sibyl than what they called the political situation. She asked Geoffrey if he knew anything about Sibyl's people. "If she should be really ill." He told her that he knew nothing. The young Wibberleys, two hearty schoolgirls and a little boy, were a humanizing distraction. Sibyl relaxed with them, and he saw her, in moments, as a careless child.

Walking from the hotel to the Wibberleys' lodgings he tried to get definiteness into a dim remembrance of those frightened eyes; and surely it was of a picture. Yes; the captive lady was compelled to dance with the bandit chief, and she stared out of the picture into *your* eyes, for there was no other figure. It was irrelevant, of course, Miss Drew could not be afraid of him. And yet he stopped for a moment, he walked slowly; he wanted time to think. Perhaps, after all, it was he whom she feared; not battle and murder and the mighty imbroglio, but the lover. He was pitiful

and exultant, and yet then and later he was doubtful.

It was agreed that they were not to talk about war and the rumors of war, but they all had relapses except Sibyl. The young Wibberleys made a lark of it and gave their parents openings for sententious reproval. Mrs. Wibberley counseled all to maintain calmness by gazing upon " the eternal hills." Instincts of politeness or acquiescence turned their eyes to Silver Howe, which they regarded steadily for some moments without appreciable result. In the absence of a humorous understanding the Wibberleys became rather tiresome, and Geoffrey could not attempt to detach Sibyl to laugh at her hosts. It was hot, it was misty, and they were missing the holiday note. As the evening deepened it became better; Mrs. Wibberley's promised calm seemed to descend upon them. The hills were succeeded by the stars or fortified by them. The young people went to bed and the elders sat in the little garden " letting it sink in "—the phrase this time was Geoffrey's.

Sunday seemed to bring an uneasy respite to a cracking world, but incredible rumors were thick for those who would gather them, and presently it was known that Germany had declared war on Russia and demanded explanations from France. Geoffrey breakfasted rather pleasantly at the hotel, and being alone he had some advantage over agitated parties which would certainly have roused Mrs. Wibberley's reprobation. Without framing the positive intention, he thought of plunging into love-making for a relief; he yearned for Sibyl alone, for the untrammeled op-

portunity. There was not much difficulty about that, for though Mrs. Wibberley was far above positive nods and winks she had the mild megalomania of the matchmaker, and knew which way things were tending. There was some question of church, and Geoffrey suggested that Grasmere church was an idea and not an institution to be put to the proof. Mrs. Wibberley determined to go and take her husband, impelled, it seemed, by critical instincts; something unusual might happen in a church and on such an occasion. It was, after all, an Established Church, and there was no trusting the Government to avoid lapses in taste or discretion. The children, of course, would accompany their parents, for the Wibberleys, without being precisely church people imposed their liberality upon the church and took in exchange such conveniences and respectabilities as it could supply. Sibyl made rather a forlorn attempt to join them and Mrs. Wibberley would not have it, and Geoffrey facetiously claimed a slight advantage in this "choice of evils." Sibyl submitted with a good grace.

They started rather languidly, but it was a relief to get in motion. Generally they were silent, for it was no time for small talk and the tremendous utterance did not come. They made their way up far Easdale, and there they found a little patch of heather and sat down among it. They had brilliant sunshine, the scent of honey, the drone of bees; it occurred to Geoffrey that this was an extraordinarily correct imitation of happiness. But the near murmurs sounded like distant menaces and the beneficent sunshine scorched

them and drove them to seek shelter. They found it with some difficulty by climbing the side of the fell to a ravine over which a mountain-ash presided. Here they attained shadow and seclusion, but there was a babble—almost a roar—of falling waters, so that they must strain the voice and the ear if they would converse. He had a mad idea to overcome the waters by a torrent of passionate speech, to shout against them till he silenced them. The impulse was not strong enough; it was all in his mind, and the inertia of the body was not to be overcome. And to bellow "I love you" against the waterfall would be absurd.

This new menace in the world took from love its fervor, made it impossible, or, at least, inopportune. So he reflected with some calmness, but he was calm enough to recall a theory of his own, that love declared itself at the powerful crisis, not the relevant one. Why, then, didn't he, like Benedick, cry "I do love nothing in the world so much as you. Is not that strange?" He had tried to found a little comedy on this, and the backward lover was to declare himself when the kitchen chimney caught fire. And here he could think of such things; a figure of comedy himself.

Sibyl rose from the rock on which she had been seated, and with a frowning face led the way from this retreat. "It isn't that I want to talk," she said when the noise was muffled, "but that takes all the virtue out of our silence. I should have begun to shout if we had stayed there."

Startled, he said, "What would you have shouted?"

She looked at him inquiringly. "I suppose a primitive human cry," she said.

They sat down again in the sunshine. "Yes," he said, "we lack a common cry such as a crow or a bleat. We're all different, we humans."

"But all alike."

He assented indifferently.

"These Germans. It's fighting your own kind."

He agreed. She was silent, and then—"Will it stop the theaters?" she said.

He saw her pathetically as a young woman with a living to make. These theatrical people are queerly isolated. They drift about the world and have no fixed address till they gain a palatial one. Even their names are not their own. They are orphans or they own snuffy old fathers and impossible mothers who hang round stage-doors. No. That sort of thing must be obsolete. They are artists now, of course, and of the highest respectability. He recollected that Mrs. Wibberley had made quite a point about it when there was a question of Sibyl coming to the tennis club. Miss Drew was a lady. A high degree of spirituality was implied. And, indeed, Sibyl was—Mrs. Wibberley had added or amplified—a gentlewoman. Pursuing Mrs. Wibberley's vein, there seemed to be no reason why she shouldn't be the daughter of a baronet, for instance. He was curious about her. Here, on this brilliant day, among the hills, and with the world splitting in twain, he found himself checked and

faintly curious. Who was she? What was she? To probe was impossible. He might have said, "Tell me all about yourself," but that was the wrong order. "I love you" must come first, and he couldn't say that now. When she was away he could have said it, and now, when she was adorably and pathetically before him, he couldn't. He didn't love her enough yet. He had not learnt to love. He was held back by all the instinctive precautions of the idealist. He was no facile lover; the delirium of joy was a thing to be held in leash. Yet in this idealism he was half-conscious of a strain of fatuity. He would not yield to mere contact; to the flush of the senses. Trembling on the brink, the final impulse was delayed.

"I made a remark," she said; "or, rather, I asked a question."

"It started me thinking of all sorts of things," he said.

"You might have thought aloud."

"Perhaps it wouldn't have been quite the same."

"You daren't tell me what you think of me," she said.

She rose again. "Too hot," she said and they walked on languidly. "The sun's like a policeman moving us on," she said. "Vagabonds."

"Actors are vagabonds, you know," he said teasingly.

"That's what I meant."

"You don't feel it?"

"No. You do, don't you?"

"Heavens! No."

"Oh, I know your opinions and convictions are all right. But your feelings——"

"I do not feel it."

"You feel the right things, don't you?"

"Now what do you mean by that?"

There had been a tinge of bitterness in her words but now she answered gaily: "See what a high ideal I've got of you! To feel and think together is just perfection, isn't it?"

"Don't," he groaned comically. She was delightful, incisive; she was positively dangerous. She gave him critical pleasure and he was becoming "cold" as the children say in the hiding game. She was capable of keeping him at a distance by delicacies of flirtation. And he had been conscious of something impending. He could have believed that she was ready to tell him something. And what was there to tell?

They sauntered down the pass, and it seemed that both had escaped from something though it could not be far away. He was disappointed and they had their little jokes together. They were missing big things and quite enjoying themselves. It was like keeping out the Atlantic with a mop. And as they approached the confines of the village he raised his arms in a stiff, impatient gesture. "I'm restless," he said; "I'm immensely perturbed." It was an excuse, a defense, and it startled her. She was very gentle with him; in a moment it seemed that she might have been an old and affectionate friend. There was more in it than that, and he felt that this was the most romantic

moment of his morning. He remembered that they had once discussed acting, and together they had reached a tentative conclusion—it was a concession for him, perhaps—that as it was self-expression we must always be acting. In that sense she was acting now, but such acting is not deception. She was always doing her best. Surely she was adorable and he a colossal fool.

They encountered the Wibberleys, who decided that the churchgoing had proved restful. Geoffrey was conscious of Mrs. Wibberley's sharp eye on them, and he had a vision of himself and Sibyl propelled towards the altar by this admirable couple, and the good Wibberley "giving her away." However, they were all friendly together, and Mrs. Wibberley led them round the churchyard to Wordsworth's grave, that haunt of deep meditation and of the platitudes. "You cannot believe in war," she said, "here," and they gazed on stone and earth and listened to the babbling stream. It was decided that war would be an affront to Wordsworth's spirit; "do they realize that?" said Mrs. Wibberley. They accomplished something very like placidity. There was an air of kindliness about it, after all. He saw these Wibberleys sometimes as facile humbugs, but the worst of us is deeply human. These were not the worst, and if they were a little blunt, their was the bluntness of the devotee. They seemed to devote themselves to nothing in particular; to the highest taste in general or to the latest of the higher fashions. Well, they were all in one boat; if the mountains fell they would all be

squashed equally, and if the Germans came they would suffer equally. Nay, it might be that he would squeal while Wibberley remained heroic. What strange things a great war would reveal! It would get down to some essential things. Laborious acquirements—call them moral or spiritual if you like—would wither away while good old primitive qualities flourished. He meditated disloyalties to the spirit of man, perhaps; he had a glimpse of chaos.

No reverberations from a frenzied world afar disturbed their afternon slackness. They had precious moments of slackness, of the old Time running out. The children vanished, and the elders sat about in deckchairs and talked and dozed and stared at nature and thought of the morrow. Geoffrey was induced to read aloud some of the "Georgian" poetry, and it was in their minds that these were young men, and that when the blast of war blows in our ears man is not merely a poet. It made everything so unreal, it shattered the reflection of everything. At intervals, Mrs. Wibberley assured them that there could be no war, but Wibberley began to take a deep, sagacious, non-committal line.

Geoffrey had no more intimate talk with Sibyl, and, indeed, they did not seek it. Their next meeting was uncertain, they did not know how far they had gone, they might yet turn back. It seemed to him that they were watching one another. It was for him to take the gallant, romantic plunge, and delays and hesitancies were affronts to his passion. Passion? Ah, that was it. An ardent man could not acquiesce

in less than that. So he must be sure. He must watch, he must assay, he must measure the flood. Or he must wait for the fire from heaven.

On Monday morning he had a letter from Mary. It reflected the perturbation of the time, and there was an indignant ring in it; the protest of the quiet person disturbed by shameful, dangerous clamor. She had met Round, it seemed, and he had asked when Geoffrey was expected home. Round had meditated, "eyeing me kindly," and then suggested that Geoffrey should come on Monday, a day earlier than he was due. Lindsay "might like to have him about," and to a hint of the loyalties Geoffrey must respond. Mary had asked Round what he thought about it all, and he had shaken his head and gone away sadly. Mary said that she had not understood how serious it all was till she saw it in Round's face. That was a symbol, an index of European upheaval. She repeated that he had been very kind to her.

So Geoffrey couldn't wait till the Tuesday morning, but set off after lunch on the Bank Holiday. "It isn't that I matter," he explained. "A war snuffs me out. But I see that I must be there. What's going to happen?"

He sent his bag on to Windermere, and set off to walk in the early afternoon. They all walked a few hundred yards with him. The Wibberley girls wanted to go to Ambleside with him but were overruled. He was quite a popular person in the little party, and had cemented friendships with a handsome offering of Grasmere gingerbread. How normal everything was

and how changed! Presently he strode away from them and, looking back, the group seemed forlorn, pathetic. Mrs. Wibberley's arm was round her boy's shoulder, and in Geoffrey's agitated mood this struck him as intolerably poignant. He was sorry to part from them. Sibyl was not prominent, and, strangely, she was not even in the front of his mind. It was a simple parting from the Wibberleys, but from her it was a perplexity to be considered presently.

He found that he had committed an error of judgment. This road walk from Grasmere to Ambleside was intolerable. Motor-cars, dust, stink, heat, made an unlovely world of it; a reeking, blatant, violent world. The ridiculous thing about it was that all this was supposed to be an expression of joy in the loveliness of nature. He became bitterly satirical about these material agitations in the land of Wordsworth and, pausing, he turned to look at distant hill-tops. Peace, quietism, the life of meditation were best. No doubt it became infernally dull after a time. He couldn't think evenly. A car driven by a man in khaki missed him narrowly, and Geoffrey reflected resentfully that the man was inefficient. These bustling, hurtling creatures were not even efficient. Was this world going to crash? And what right had he to dissociate himself from it? Were they on the eve of a national humiliation? The braggarts might pretend to confidence and call it patriotism, but at the heart of every Englishman was this distrust. We had been so long a great nation. And we had learnt that greatness is not all in what we have so gallantly sung

about. You may lead the world in noble things and go down before iron and brass.

At Ambleside, Geoffrey got a lift in the public car and rumbled away in moderate discomfort. He found himself traveling against the stream, and with a choice of empty railway carriages. He pursued his gloomy reflections on the theme of national decadence or national softness. Had we failed to conform to the conditions of national existence? Must we go down before the conquerors of the world? Would the nightmares come true? It was going to be a bad time for gentle people, for the Christian spirit, for the pure in heart. He must be ready to learn, but he must be loyal to what he knew and felt.

At Lancaster he was joined by a slightly intoxicated reservist on his way to join up and witnessed the family parting. The man was bluff and jocose, the woman voluble and conscious of her part, the children seemed to take their cue in forlorn whimpering. The man bawled words of comfort and turned to wink at Geoffrey, who didn't like it. The whistle sounded, the baby was held aloft, the scene became significant, as the train moved. The silent woman holding up the baby passed from his sight, the man leaned out of the window, shouting and waving. He was noisy and inadequate. Falling back heavily into his seat, he glared stupidly at Geoffrey and fumbled for his pipe. "Make a bit o' fuss. Women and kids," he said apologetically. It was one man of the world to another. "Wonderful cook," he said. He was referring to his wife, and Geoffrey divined a consciousness that she

did not make a favorable impression upon an outsider. He repeated "Wonderful cook," shaking his head in affected meditation. "Your wife?" said Geoffrey, and he replied "Rather!"

Geoffrey was curious to know his trade, and put it to him that it was awkward to be called up suddenly like this. It appeared that he was in the butchering line. The man was not conscious of any joke in the alternatives of soldier and butcher, or perhaps the joke had lost its savor. He was with his brother-in-law. "Nice little business," he said, and with nods and winks explained that the brother-in-law was a bachelor. "Lot older than me," he said, and the man of the world shone out again; an ill-favored wife was more than justified. His comments on the European situation had some verbal quaintness but they were not interesting. He produced a bottle which was proffered politely. Geoffrey declined and, frowning slightly, he took a good swig himself. He proffered it again, quite without truculence, and Geoffrey—he didn't know why—was impelled to accept. The mouth of the bottle was wiped with a filthy handkerchief. It was stiffish whisky and water and Geoffrey felt a glow and lift. The man said he knew a gentleman when he saw one. "You oughter be first class," he said, and added sympathetically, "I know what it is to be out o' luck." He grew sentimental. "Them kids 'll be 'avin' their tea," he said, and then, "She's a wonderful manager."

When you see a soldier going to the war you want to know what's in his heart; what is the quality of

his fortitude or the color of his apprehensions; what he sees at the end of the vista. "It may be some time before you see them again," said Geoffrey, and if he had feared that his curiosity might be brutal or selfish he was reassured. The man warmed to his own case, in which the children and the wonderful woman were prominent, but the nice little business the principal item. A stray bullet might bring irremediable loss, and he was eloquent on the dangers of war to men of substance. As to boys with their way to make it didn't matter, but he had a lofty ideal of property. All the same, you must do your duty, and then, and for many days to come, Geoffrey felt that something new—something old as the hills but strangely revived and strengthened—was coming into the world. You might whittle away a great deal from this fellow's pretensions, but something remained; he merely conformed, but there may be profound virtue in conformity. And, in his slipshod, drunken way, he faced the thing; he was aware of the specter at the end of the avenue. He had heard a man say that when your time came you had to go, and if it wasn't a bullet it might be inflammation of the lungs. What did Geoffrey think of that? He wasn't sure about it himself —"not if you kept out of draughts," he said—but, anyhow, it was for the old soldiers to show the way. "You young chaps may have your turn this time—young gentlemen," he corrected. The bottle was proffered again. Geoffrey declined, pleading a poor head for that sort of thing, and the excuse was accepted with commiseration. "Y'd not b'lieve what I've

drunk this day," the man said. It was impossible to attempt heavy reproach or argument with such a figure of complacency. Geoffrey had the notion that it would be amusing to throw the bottle out of the window, but a row would be tiresome. The man talked and drank intermittently. Finally he collapsed into sleep, and Geoffrey recalled having seen Coquelin do it almost precisely like this in that old play *L'Aventurière,* which had been his first taste of Parisian gaieties.

He was left meditating on his own romantic attachment, and wondering dejectedly whether it had the makings of a passion. Yet he affected to despise these grand passions, all of a pattern; he wanted something of his own, human, but not merely humanity's. He wanted a sweetheart and she was charming. He wanted simple, irresponsible romance without thought of the long years and the heavy times. The noble lover is beset with doubts and he may even envy the Don Juans of the world. He had not learnt to love, he was not sure, and presently all might be simplified. Nearing Manchester, it seemed that it was simplified. To leave her, to be without her, was intolerable. His heart sank and he felt that he must concede something to himself, so he permitted his thoughts to take a happy turn. And yet he could not get away from this menace of the war; he realized that he was not one of those who can rush to the adventure. His thoughts grew heavy, heavy. He was profoundly disturbed. He hadn't even first principles arranged, and convictions, it seemed, must be improvised. He was for

peace, but he had no faith in the dogmas that excluded war. It was coming, and it could not be brushed gently aside.

The husband going to the war slept heavily, and he was an unlovely creature, a queer type of the heroic arming for the fray. And even a queerer one, perhaps, of the married life, of the faithful mate. You might say that he had married for a share in the butchering business and was out to defend it. And why not? We are a solid nation with great possessions, and we shall not abandon them to follow any will-o'-the-wisp. Geoffrey gazed with distaste on his fellow-man who sprawled and reeked there so puzzlingly. Somewhere in that ugly carcass, uglier than the beasts he slew, was the precious residue of that indomitable spirit which was to shatter the world, and, somehow, in the fullness of time, to save it. The sleeper was not easily aroused at Manchester, and Geoffrey did not enjoy the proddings and shakings that were necessary to achieve it. The fellow went off morosely to some vague destination.

CHAPTER IX

THE EVE

THE Manchester streets had the restless, jaded look of any summer evening. The people who thronged excessively the main thoroughfares, were keyed to a sharper note than usual, and yet it seemed that wars and rumors of wars were nothing to some, while with others the long period of stress and endurance was now beginning to show even in aspects resolutely normal. It was on this evening that Germany declared war on France, and Sir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons was coming through in fragments to the evening papers. It was received with dismay, with reprobation, with grave acquiescence, with enthusiasm. The nation had not acquired an attitude and while one section was ready with its facile acclamations of war another resisted, protested, strained at the inevitable and desperately pressed its opposition even beyond the bounds that reason and knowledge might justify. The party of peace had failed, and any word of indiscretion in the bitterest moment of its failure was to be recorded and reiterated. In hundreds of clubs and thousands of pothouses, the feeble minority was overwhelmed and it seemed that a nation of Cassandras, in the glow of prophecy, had neglected the obvious precautions for

safety. The *Herald* strove yet against the stream, and its final, impassioned protests roused some childish displays of popular fury. Charges of German influence, of mere treachery, were less to bear than the reproaches of those ungenerous opponents who professed to find nothing but perverseness and sentimentality in a great and courageous policy with hard thinking behind its idealism. The *Herald* could laugh at the threat of broken windows but not at broken friendships; when a drunken man demanded to see its list of shareholders it was not difficult to achieve an ironical politeness. But in the heat of these early days passion ran easily into molds and attitudes became fixed. We have suffered a good deal in this war from the fixed attitude, though it may be difficult sometimes to distinguish this from the finer endurance.

Geoffrey called at the office—a blank, dreary place between-times on this holiday evening—and it appeared that, in default of work more to the point, there was a theater to be "covered." If the piece had been a great tragedy it might have been opportune, but here was some comedy on the borders of farce, some trivial fiddling while Rome burned. It seemed a futility, but habit and custom persist through the cracks of doom, and while history was making itself too furiously for coherent record the world at large was still controlled by its old machinery. If there was a difference it was in the mind. Geoffrey concluded that he had not time to go home, and he went for his dinner to the garish hotel where the froth and

spume of Manchester life gathers. Sitting there in the grill-room waiting for his chop he had a glimpse of what was called the French restaurant, locally reputed to be the last word in expensive luxury. To-night he had a childlike notion of it as a wicked, reckless place; he could have fondly supposed that luxury was breathing its last there—a supposition that events were not to justify. In the hotel generally there was vast uneasiness and doubtless some of the guests believed that the waiters had bombs in their coat-tails. Many of the waiters had disappeared, and those who remained suggested that Switzerland was really the main source of the German language. Geoffrey dined with a certain enjoyment of the occasion, with a sham calm and an uneasy consciousness that he was missing things. At the heart of the world were fierce excitements now and great resolves were making. He was not even at the heart of the *Herald,* he was infinitely small and useless. Yet it might be that a time was coming when all values would be altered, when every man would have to show the native hue of his resolution, when the soft places and the cloistered lives would be rudely broken upon.

Geoffrey exchanged nods with Bonsor who was dining with a friend a few tables away. Both stared at him and Bonsor's friend turned away with what struck Geoffrey as an ugly laugh. He forgot them, and presently went out into the garden where he ordered coffee; an inexplicable craving caused him to add a liqueur. He sipped and glowed with some illusion of power and assurance, weak and doubtful at

the heart. Bonsor appeared with his friend, and stopped to pronounce some emphatic platitude of the occasion. He mentioned the *Herald,* half turning to his friend, who repeated "The *Herald!*" and laughed spasmodically. "Who is this rude gentleman?" said Geoffrey, quoting a line that Irving used to speak with exquisite effect in Wills's *Charles I.* Bonsor, in some confusion, introduced Mr. Riley, and did not gain in ease of manner when the others merely stared at one another. He was unhappily inspired to explain that Geoffrey had no responsibility for the politics of the paper. "Except in agreeing heartily with them," said Geoffrey. "Then you endorse——" began Mr. Riley. "Everything," said Geoffrey. "I have no more to say." "Thank God," said Geoffrey. He felt delightfully pugnacious.

They went off haughtily and he enjoyed lounging there and gazing after them superciliously. He knew it was a poor sort of triumph, and it occurred to him that whatever his theories of peace might be he had the quarrelsome strain in him. He had been considerably less than gentle, something less than wise, but at least he had been loyal. Men of the Bonsor breed often gave him the chance to detach himself from the *Herald* politics, and they would hint at sympathies with his difficult position. He would have none of it and espoused almost any opinion of a colleague if it was subjected to unmannerly attack. Of course he agreed generally, though he had never pretended to believe in the plenary inspiration of the *Herald.*

He sipped again and stretched his legs. It was nearly time to be gone, but if anybody would like to come and quarrel with him now was the time. He positively began to look round upon the groups truculently; he burlesqued his own mood. And then, surprisingly, Secretan appeared; it was unusual to see him there, and Geoffrey wondered what restless spirit had brought him. He was calm, debonair; he seemed infinitely reassuring. He was a man of words, perhaps, but if you can find the right words for a cataclysm you have conquered it. The right words now demanded the highest courage, which is the highest wisdom.

Secretan sat down with Geoffrey and gave him something of the hectic gossip of the occasion. Invited by Geoffrey to drink or sip, he declined courteously; he was a man who did not neglect the forms. "A bit of comfort before the heavens fall?" suggested Geoffrey, and then Secretan accepted, very much as you yield smilingly to an importunate child. He was a simple, inscrutable creature. One guessed at him and idealized, falling short or wide of his ideals. He was one of the Samurai who would meet you, quaintly, as a man of the world.

And now, it seemed, we were all going to be shattered and reformed, and who could say what any man would be when he emerged? We were fragile forms adventuring among iron events. And, of course, Secretan was not calm; he was never calm, and the personal dignity was no pretense. They talked of the news and of the rumors. They even touched on the

Liberal party; a Liberal paper, be it never so liberal, cannot quite ignore the Liberal party. It seemed that this was gone, disrupted, shattered, crying in the wilderness or rushing to shelter. It is an awful uncertainty when you are uncertain of yourself. Party! The word sounded hollow and insincere, something to be stripped off. And yet men in that party had been holding together in comradeship, not without ideals, and even now, like all wise men, they rebelled against the fatalism that makes for war. Geoffrey and Secretan were shy of the particular policies. Secretan would not or could not talk of them. They spoke of the old, romantic ideals of war, of aid between nations, of the new concern with humanity, of the slums of Manchester or of the Russian peasant. But you can't stick to generalities when your house is falling. Who is to lead? Who is to resign? Who is to emerge? These are questions for the politician. Above all, when does the menace become the irrevocable? When will the first blood be spilt?

They parted and Geoffrey felt it to be indeed a parting, as when time or great events must intervene before the next meeting. He went to his theater and there they played "God save the King," as a prelude to the evening's futilities. It had some value; it touched the emotions if it did not efface the critical spirit. The king was not precisely the symbol that Geoffrey would have chosen, but, revolting as he did against the event, the sense of nationality glowed and waxed. And then they settled down to the foolish comedy and laughter rang false. It was all a sham

and extraordinarily like the old reality, the old boredom. And how happy those old dull evenings seemed now! At such a time as this a man begins to find out things about himself and, if he be sincere, he may go far in discovery. Geoffrey had never conceived himself as the natural adventurer, and now he perceived that dreads and even mere timidities were crowding upon him. Decision and action were to be forced upon his indolence, and to the weakness of his flesh might come the fiery trial.

The wretched play did not hold his attention, but was making the audience laugh and more than half forget the great preoccupation. They felt a little ashamed of themselves, and in the interval assured one another that in these times distraction was the thing. Geoffrey could stand no more and went back to the office, which was mightily excited. Already they were short-handed, for the Territorials were called up; the place buzzed with rumors and news. And here were men trying to be honest with themselves, to get some sort of definition into their position, to repel the counsels of timidity or mere prudence. They had to reconstruct their policy in the light of tremendous events; to accept the present and be loyal to the past; to be wise under the burden of reproach. The old tunes and cries were in their ears, the old tradition of chivalry was in their blood while they made the last struggle for peace. Geoffrey, away from the center of things, could only guess at what went on in the inner councils. He was conscious of deep sympathy with Lindsay, confronted with the greatest and most

distracting of events at a time when men of a normal vigor are ready for repose; but that indomitable spirit had yet work to do and would not shrink from it. And, indeed, Lindsay was worthy of the devotion of any practical idealist. All his life he had declined the invitations to do the comfortable thing, to range himself with his class, to make the long leader of the *Herald* the greatest common measure of Manchester or of the Empire. Now his enemies pointed at him and talked of retribution and Nemesis. He had had difficulties before, but here, it seemed, was an overwhelming one. Even when national disaster threatens, you may squeeze out a little malice.

Geoffrey encountered Attar and got the latest bulletin. Attar was the calm man immensely perturbed. "God guide us," he said; "we're at a point where a hideous mistake might be made. We can't oppose a national war, a war for existence."

"It's come to that?"

"We shall declare war within the next twenty-four hours."

"What is national existence?" said Geoffrey. "At a time like this, I realize that I've never thought clearly about these things. Suppose that the Germans are altogether more efficient in war than the rest of the world, and conquer us all in three months. It's a conspicuous humiliation, of course. I suppose I should be miserable. Should I be any the worse for it?"

"Oh, be damned!" said Attar. "The art galleries still open on Sundays—an improved system of heat-

ing. You're the man I'm afraid of. You'd let us down."

"I don't say I wouldn't die to prevent it," said Geoffrey, "but I want to clear my mind. I want to be honest. Why shouldn't you let people see your mind working? Why bother about consistency? A newspaper becomes an immense façade."

"It's no time for ingenious talk," said Attar impatiently. "If you can't get right now on feeling you're no good." He broke away, but after a few steps down the corridor he came back. "Don't think I'm not loyal to Lindsay and the paper," he said. "We've done all we can. We've been wise according to our lights. Here's a sudden illumination and we're on the edge of the bottomless pit. It's no use saying it oughtn't to be there."

"If we are wrong now we can't remain wrong," said Geoffrey.

"Why not?"

"As you say, Attar, you are loyal. Then you must have some faith in the reason and conscience—yes, and the feeling of the men here. They're not fools."

"I agree. But if you take a wrong road and persist in it ever so little, the mischief's done. An awful mistake is possible. I'm wretched to-night, Arden. I can do nothing."

He was soon to be reassured, but these were hard days for all who could only wait and hope. Geoffrey went home and found Mary waiting for him as he knew he should. He realized, as he approached the house, that he shrank from the discussion with her;

he had a dim prescience of the line it would take. And Mary was excited and uncompromising. War was a monstrous wickedness, an evil to be resisted on all occasions and at all costs. Geoffrey in these days —and in the months and years—was to know the unhappiness of perpetual and alternative opposition. It seemed that the world was divided into the warlike and the pacific, and there was no room for those of the middle way. They seemed to be weak even while they held strongly to what they could perceive of reason and justice. His talk with Mary seemed to be the converse of that with Attar, who certainly was no fire-eater. Mary was startled to perceive in Geoffrey a change, a difference; if there was not yet a rift between them they began to see where the rift would be. She became quieter and she watched him anxiously.

"It must come," he said.

And there burst from her a shrillness of protest; it was on a note that he hardly knew in her; it was lament and reproach and the despair of incitement.

"We must defend our country," he said.

"It's not attacked."

"We must defend Belgium—France."

She stopped to consider this. Any generosity of idealism appealed to her. "We shall be tricked into this war by words," she said.

"It's hard things that are happening."

"You all want it. You want war," she cried rashly. He did not reply to that except to say, "What should we do?"

"I can't tell you what to do about these words and documents. I can tell you the spirit you want. It's the spirit of Christ. I hear no word of Christ. The churches are very busy but they've forgotten about Christ."

"Mention a practical point," he said wearily. And she proposed that the king and his ministers should "go right across to Berlin," and see the Kaiser and the others and settle it. He objected that they would all be taken prisoners immediately, but she waived that aside impatiently and developed a kind of mad logic in the scheme. "It has never been tried," she said. "We are all human and you won't trust humanity. It would be noble and nothing could resist it. You trust to documents and despatches and dried-up old diplomatists, not in God, not in yourselves even. You go to war according to the precedents. Everybody is horrified at war and you go to war. Are there ten thousand people in Germany who want war? You know there are not."

"I agree with a good deal of what you say," said Geoffrey. "As to the king and the rest of 'em going to Germany, I haven't the slightest objection, but it won't be done. You have to consider what can and what can't be done." He cited the famous visit of John Bright and the Quakers to Russia.

"No doubt I'm a fool," said Mary, "and the men who rule the world are very wise. They talk to the people about the Fatherland and the Nation, and they betray them. They are only bandits themselves. They lead simple men to slaughter. It's easy to make

a plausible case for war. You can argue me down but I'm right. If I'm not, the churches and chapels should all shut up. How can they pretend that Christ would agree?"

"We've rationalized Christ," said Geoffrey. He advanced a tepid, dispirited argument about taking the world as you found it. He was tired and hadn't the energy to put his case. She harped on Christ, she thundered Christ at him. "I'm not a Christian in any literal sense," he said, "and I didn't know you were. I don't think Christ covers the ground. We may be quite wrong in going into this war, but war may be righteous. You think not. I try to get at your point of view and I can nearly do it. But not quite. There's a hard bit of common sense in me that stops me. I suppose it's that I accept this world more than you do. I'm of this world. There are things that I would fight for. Of course, I mistrust all these diplomatists; I hate war, it's a last resort." He got up from his chair. "Let's go to bed, Mary."

"You've not had your supper. I'll fetch it." She returned directly with a tray, and as she entered the room she said resentfully: "You meant that I was to go to bed."

"Well, why not? Are you going to rail at me as I eat my supper? Is it for your own pleasure or my advantage? I'm tired, I'm sick at heart. I want you to leave me alone."

"It's not fair of you," she cried. "You know it's immensely important. Yes, here and now, between you and me. You're cowardly. If you felt as I do—

on either side, I mean—you couldn't rest; you couldn't just eat your supper and go to bed. You can't scorn me. I'm not absurd. I'll listen to you. I want you to say wise, illuminating things. I'll listen humbly. I can't bear that you should push me aside as of no account. If I go to bed now I shall lie there thinking of you. I shall think of you as unfair; yes, and rather stupid, Geoffrey. I shall feel that you are unworthy. It isn't the war. I can bear the war if it has to be. Millions of people—innocent people—being killed. I could bear that. I suppose so. But it's you and me."

"Mary," he said, "I'm conscious of wanting to evade you. I'm racked with doubts, I can't see anything clearly." He paused and drew a chair up to the table. "I shall be better when I've had my supper," he said; "I think that'll put heart into me. Just wait a few minutes."

"It's a poor, cold supper," she said; "I couldn't be bothered with it to-night."

"It's all right," he said. "I had dinner at the Midland."

"Why didn't you come home?"

"I was late."

"You wanted to avoid me."

"Now, now——"

"You did."

"Mary, I shall avoid you whenever I please. It won't be often and it wasn't so to-night."

Presently she said: "Will you have some claret?"

"That might help."

"Help?"

"Help me to recover tone."

She poured out a glass and he gulped with satisfaction. She began to laugh, she continued almost hysterically.

"What is it?" he said.

"It's so ridiculous to see you sitting there eating and drinking and gathering strength to annihilate me."

"I've no idea of annihilating you."

"Then you ought to have," she said crossly; "you ought to be intensely anxious to show that you're right and I'm wrong. You just want to get rid of me."

"Take the simple issue," said Geoffrey. "Are we to let Germany trample over Belgium and France and possess them?"

"We are to do what Christ would. Do you doubt what that would be?"

"Yes," he said. "I've been thinking of that during these days. I've wished that I was simply a Christian or simply a fire-eater. It's easy for you, Mary. It's easy for these blatant patriots who are shouting for war."

"Easy to decide, yes. Easy to live it out? I don't know. Geoffrey, you wouldn't fight? You wouldn't kill people?"

"Why not?"

"Shoot them? Run swords into them and see them die. Don't you see now? Think of it. Isn't that convincing? You see how wicked it is. It can't be done."

"It would be horrible. I should be qualmish, of

course. But we come to it. We don't bring death into the world. Torn flesh, a little blood——"

"But it's the spirit. You kill the spirit. They die reproaching you."

"This line won't do, Mary. Some of the finest spirits in the world have been soldiers."

"And repented."

"How?"

"There's Tolstoy——"

"Too much of Tolstoy," he said. And then he continued: "What impressed me in *War and Peace* was Tolstoy's conception of the great masses of men moving inevitably while little Napoleons and Kaisers gave orders and thought they were doing everything. And now it's the Chancellors and the Sir Edward Greys making up their minds in a void. They're dealing with forces that they can't hold back."

"Yes," she said eagerly, "but we've each got a soul. I can bear it if we're crushed by fate, but I must be right and you must be wrong."

"My soul is not yours," he said.

"I know that I must seem very arrogant," she said. "I won't be always at you like a nagging wife. I see us falling apart—farther and farther apart. And there's so much to bear."

"These masses," he said, "these blind masses moving against one another—it seems very stupid, it lacks reason; and yet one or the other may be broadly, roughly right. Good enough to die for."

Her protests were dwindling. She sank to a troubled meditation. He watched her, hoping that it

was over for this night. She said: "I think if you were to die for what you thought right, I could bear it very well."

It was a noble concession. And they talked quietly for a while of affairs at the office. It was to him like a microcosm of the great troubled world, for there too he seemed to be groping amid loyalties and doubts. "With all our faults we stand for something big," he said, and she knew that he meant England now. She could respond to the old idea of dying for one's country, to the old songs and the old cries. She had ceased for the time to struggle, but in her heart she knew that she could never acquiesce.

CHAPTER X

THE WAR'S HERE

It was a whim that made Geoffrey choose a German restaurant that night of all the nights, but he was not the only Englishman who did so. He had telephoned to Mary that he should not come home to dinner, and while he spoke to her he was conscious that there was no compelling reason why he should not; nothing beyond an extreme restlessness and, as he realized when he heard the telephone's diminuendo of her patient voice, a reluctance to face her again. She asked for news, and he told her that Germany was invading Belgium and that in a few hours we should be at war. He waited for her comment, half-expecting the emphatic and indignant, but there was a long pause and he thought she must have gone away till he heard a gentle "Good-night, Geoffrey," which made him wish he had gone home to her. The wish was transient, for, even now, there was nothing to prevent his going. He had a vague expectation that he might be wanted, and he found himself continually looking for a note or hearkening for a message. There was both bitterness and humility in the feeling or the knowledge—he was not sure which it was—that his work did not matter now. He was stranded and forgotten; some routine

of work went on, but it was like a clacking loom without a warp in it.

He went out into the streets and, wanting food, he soon took refuge from their intolerable clamor in a little familiar room which seemed already to have become curious and sinister. Some of those he had seen swigging beer there, were on their way to Germany, and the waiter, too, had gone. Behind the bar the proprietor, with a sad and civil air, saluted his customers and passed out the dishes; his wife waited upon them with nervous haste. The place was half empty, and Geoffrey found what was nearly a quiet corner, but the little less turned out to be whole worlds away. Across the gangway and a little in front of him, three people were drinking at a table, and it seemed that interest in his advent had momentarily silenced them. They soon renewed their conversation, which, indeed, was very much a monologue by the man facing him. He was a big, blatant fellow of sanguine complexion, one of those who talk at people rather than to them, and he soon attempted to bring Geoffrey within his sphere of influence. His companions were a woman, who laughed weakly, maddeningly, at everything, and a little man with a depressed back, a figure of morose submission.

"I've always stood up for the Germans," bellowed the big man. "Here, mister, how much of your beer have I drunk—first and last?" He waved an empty mug and held it out for replenishment. The proprietor's eyes were far away; he might have been considering the question. He was a spare, dark man of

middle age, vaguely foreign, but not typically German. His patient, slightly ironical glance fell on the big man.

"Put it in gallons, mister." And then, with an air of triumph, "He can't calc'late it."

The fresh beer was brought and the big man rose solemnly, mug in hand. Ceremoniously he raised the lid. "Gentlemen both," he said—Geoffrey was fairly in it now—"I'll ask you to join me in drinking my girl's health. I'm off for the front to-night, aren't I, Amy?" The woman laughed again and got out a handkerchief to mop her eyes; it crossed Geoffrey's mind that to him she might possibly be attractive. The little man rose obediently. Geoffrey felt a fool, but he could do no less. Catching the woman's eye, he bowed and put his mug to his lips. She inclined her head graciously and not without dignity.

The big man drained his pot, which, in the circumstances, was a considerable feat. Leaning over the table he raised it with dramatic gesture and dashed it to the floor. There was a startled silence in the room. The proprietor put down a dish that he was holding and stood stern and ready. The big man enjoyed the sensation to the full. He dropped his voice now, as the cunning orator does: "Not another drop o' German beer till I drink it at—Berlin." He shouted the last word and sat down.

Geoffrey saw the proprietor exchange glances with his wife, and she came immediately with cloth and dish to clear up the mess. With a large, affable magnanimity the big man said: "Sorry to give you the

trouble, ma'am." A great, if temporary, calm had come upon him and he addressed the little man colloquially: "Yes, as I was sayin', y'aven't the physique. I dare say y'd just pass. I say nothin' about y'r spirit. Talks o' 'listin' "—he addressed Geoffrey—" and quite right, too. You'll all 'ave to. 'T's not 'alf a job, this. They've no Bismarck now an' they've no Von Molkey, but they're an 'ot lot all the same."

He cast a critical eye on the little man. "Not much to 'it," he said, and winked at Geoffrey. The woman laughed shrilly and, looking at Geoffrey, checked herself. "Want o' physique," said the big man, squaring his shoulders; "it's to be 'oped you've pluck." With a touch of ferocity he said: "Y'aren't afraid o' the Germans? 'Ow'd y' like a bullet in y'r mouth or a bit o' shell in y'r belly?—beg pardon, stomach.—It's different from sitting here drinking beer."

And then, amazingly, the little man found his tongue. Beginning, "Oh! you talk a lot," he struck a high, violent note. He thumped the table, he poured out verbiage about his country, he swore at the Germans, and defied the lightning generally. He subsided suddenly and the big man, turning to Geoffrey, nodded and winked. "He'll do," he said. "It's on'y a question of chest measurement." It seemed that it was his turn again, and that the little man had queered his pitch. He required a stimulant and called out in a reasonable voice: "Any Bass?" The proprietor slightly shook his head and the big man got up. "Good God!" he said. "No Bass! We've been here too long. Come on, Amy;" and then, to the other,

"Are y' comin'?" The little man had had enough of him and indicated some remainder of beer as a cause for delay. The other looked into the mug and laughed scornfully; the woman echoed him. "Well—till we meet in Berlin, eh? Or p'raps you'll see me off? It's 10.45, London Road. There'll be lots there, won't there, Amy?" He clapped the little man on the back, and gave Geoffrey an exaggerated salute. Then he faced the proprietor, who returned his stare. He threw a half-crown on the counter, "Keep the change," he said, and swaggered out, the woman following. It was a meretricious performance, but it left them feeling rather small.

The little man eyed Geoffrey sideways with a sneering expression. They understood one another, but the instinct for articulation was strong. "Lot o' swank," he said. Geoffrey replied: "I believe it's been said that a bully is not always a coward." The little man pondered over this; presently he got up and stood before Geoffrey. "Going to volunteer yourself?" he said. "You're young enough."

Geoffrey was startled. He said that he had hardly considered it yet, and when the man sat down on the other side of his table he felt that this was making unwarrantable inroads upon his privacy. The other leaned over and said confidentially: "D'y feel a bit of sinking in y'r stomach?"

"Really——" Geoffrey began. But the little man looked appealingly at him and said, "I do."

He did not look heroic. He was a rather meager and yet weedy specimen of the clerk class, with a

horrid little waxed mustache. It may have been the circumstances of his confidences that gave his face a furtive expression, yet Geoffrey was aware of a spiritual struggle.

"It's been sprung on us, this," said the little man. "We aren't ready for it; men like me, I mean. What are we going to do? I don't fancy myself on a battlefield. Will it come to that? Shall we be expected—that fellow there"—he jerked his head towards the door—"said so."

He swallowed several times as he waited for a reply. Geoffrey didn't know what to say and wasn't sure how far to abase himself with this fellow-creature who wanted something better than platitudes. Was he to assume a large confidence, to encourage the valiant enterprise, to give the little man a refined version of his late companion's incitements? This would be to travel far on a road to which he was not yet committed. His impulse was friendly, but he could hardly be comforting. "We've all got to search our consciences a bit," he said.

"Search our consciences," repeated the little man thoughtfully and he nodded, finding some help or appearance of help in the phrase. "But that chap"—and his references to the big man had always a touch of resentment—"he's got no conscience. He just goes off with a burst."

"You and I are different, perhaps," said Geoffrey. And then he added: "We're thinking men."

It was a gross piece of flattery, but the little man accepted it with dignity. Perhaps it touched an un-

easy spot, for he said: "I talked like a fool just now."

Geoffrey said: "Of course. Before him."

"That's it."

They nodded at one another understandingly. It seemed to bring a little comfort, and the little man grasped at more comfort: "P'raps it'll be all over in a week or two," he said.

Geoffrey shook his head.

"Maybe I'm different from others, but I don't know. I've no right to ask how y'd feel y'rself."

He was not an adventurous spirit. He wanted to have feelings and aspirations in common. In a crowd he would have shouted or run with the rest, perhaps have died safely and honorably with the rest. Here, his manhood had a quavering, veritable existence of its own, but he looked at Geoffrey appealingly.

"We're all very much alike," Geoffrey said.

"Afraid, d'y mean?"

"I think we're afraid of being afraid."

He knitted his brows at this, and Geoffrey said, rather testily, "Any one would be afraid at first. You've got to learn courage like anything else." And he went on to tell of an old colonel he knew who had been through the Crimean War, and had laughed to recall how scared he was when first he heard the guns thundering about him.

"He came out all right?" said the little man, and Geoffrey answered: "A perfect hero."

This was pondered, and then Geoffrey was disconcerted when the man put his hand over his face and gasped out, "The 'orrors of the battlefield!" It was

a renouncement of these shallow comforts, a plea for a deeper reassurance, and yet Geoffrey shrank from it as from something melodramatic and insincere. Doubtless the poor soul had some vision derived from garish descriptions or horrific pictures and could not fit into it his shrinking self. He pulled himself together, he glanced uneasily at the German proprietor, whose eyes were still far away, he got up and stood for a moment hesitating. "Well," he said, "I've taken a liberty—times like these."

"We're in the same boat," said Geoffrey kindly. The man looked at him wistfully, beset still with doubts. "Well, good-night," he said. It would have been a depressed exit, but, remembering himself, he swaggered past the German, who said, "Good-night, sir," in response to a haughty nod.

Geoffrey finished his meal and lit his cigarette. He sat there scorning these insensate furies of war, contemptuous of those who saw in Germany just a power for evil, a nation of barbarous aggressors. He was deeply conscious of an agony of doubt, he was no more master of himself than was the little man whose mentor he had been just now. And it seemed to him that, as a spring which grows into a great river might have been diverted this way or that, he hesitated at the source; some small decision might be swollen by tributaries to greatness. He could have prayed for light, and he had a momentary envy of those who had the habit. A skeptical recovery brought the reflection that those who pray for light may exalt any will-o'-the-wisp as the true illumination.

The restaurant emptied, and he was left with the proprietor and his wife. She had her hat on, and at a whisper from her husband she took it off when she came to serve the coffee. Geoffrey said some word of apology for detaining her as he glanced round the empty room. She shook her head as she turned away, and he perceived that she was agitated. Her husband handed out her hat, touched her on the shoulder, and she was gone immediately. In a few minutes Geoffrey rose and approached the counter to pay his bill. "I fear," he said, "that madame——" he hesitated, ending with "these are bad times."

"She wanted to get home to her children," said the man.

"Bad times for you, I fear," said Geoffrey.

"I shall not have the honor of serving you again—at present. We are closing here. I am over the military age, but I am a German. I suppose I shall soon be in prison."

"I am sorry," said Geoffrey. Then he said, "Good luck to you," and held out his hand. The German looked surprised but he took it eagerly. "And to you, sir," he said.

"A speedy peace, I hope," said Geoffrey. He was going when the man arrested him with "It will not be long."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Germany is very powerful. We shall soon win."

"I'm damned if you will," said Geoffrey. And as he walked back to the office he reflected that this was the sort of trifle that determined an issue. In a mo-

ment he was bellicose. He was ready to quarrel or to enlist or to head a charge. He was an Englishman on whose dominions the sun never sets, and these arrogant Germans must be shown their place. "A place in the sun," they had demanded, and, of course, we must be fair to them. He had admired that fellow in the restaurant, he had been touched by the wife. And he must guard against these silly impulses of irritation and offended pride. A vast amount of provoking folly was loosed now, and he must try to hold himself aloof from it, to concentrate steadily on the things that mattered. He was to be guided by reason and to beware of that trap for reason—argument. He was to be wise and charitable and to choose the nobler part. It is easy to be a good man in the void.

He was frequently conscious now of Mary's sympathy or Mary's opposition, and sometimes he reviewed the events of the day in order to select those which he might mention to her with more or less of safety. He was timid and anxious to avoid discussion, while she was ready to thresh things out at any hour of the day, to go over the old ground, to break into the old vehemencies. He told himself and her that it was useless and worse than useless for them to talk of the ethics of war in terms of emotion, he was not quite innocent of the pose of reason and philosophy. He would combat her when he was roused, but he didn't want to be roused; sometimes, rather cunningly, he would make concessions of no great value to placate her. In his heart he knew that he couldn't be faithful to any pact with Mary against the world; that he ac-

cepted the world or this phase of it in a sense impossible to her; that he had not enthusiasm or conviction for the extremes of pacific idealism. He was a critic, not a rebel, and yet, though he had a contempt for the pedants who would have it that criticism is just a reference to criteria, here he was groping in the dark with mere instincts to warn him of hindrance or help. He had never thought things out. Why had he never thought things out?

Sitting late with Mary over breakfast, he thought he might tell her of the small adventure at the restaurant. They had not spoken of the great news, for Great Britain had declared war, and she was glowering over the *Herald* leader. She threw the paper down.

"So it's accepted," she said. "You agree. It's all right. You're all comfortable now."

And, indeed, that is what he had been feeling. There was—to put it mildly—discomfort enough before them, but here was the *Herald* ranged loyally on the side of the war, and it was impossible to deny that this made life easier. Geoffrey was ready to maintain passionately that there was no baseness of acquiescence here. They had fought their good fight against war; they were beaten, and now, when all these great forces were irrevocably let loose, there was no question of their side. But Mary was all for the difficult way. Gentle, withdrawn, remote, she was always at heart a furious rebel. And now she pitched away the peccant *Herald* and began her old tirade. It went on till Geoffrey said, "I'm tired of Christ and Tol-

stoy," when she stopped suddenly and resentfully. They sat sullen and silent, but there was a diversion; Milly Warde came in.

She came, bringing an honest, vigorous life to the fragilities and smashing them right and left. It was an impulse that she couldn't resist. She had come to congratulate Geoffrey on the *Herald* having mended its ways and come over to the national side at last. They had been wayward, naughty children, it appeared, and now had decided to be good. So pats and kisses for them and all was well. "It's been horribly uncomfortable for us, you know," she said; "why did you go on like that? Of course, I know it's not Geoffrey's fault, but he might have told Mr. Lindsay. The sort of thing people were saying, I mean. Have you any Germans on the staff, really? It's been beastly for those of us who are your friends. Do keep all right now, won't you?"

She rattled on, and presently became aware that there wasn't much response. Then she stopped and looked at them. "Of course, I'm a great silly," she said, and then, "There'll be some point in being a nurse now."

And then it struck Geoffrey that she saw rather farther than he had thought. She had taken things with a rush, as she generally did, and she had established her position without qualification. But it appeared that she was watching Mary, to whom she spoke suddenly: "Do you remember, Mary, how you used to make me admire Rossetti's sonnet?"

It was Geoffrey who said, "Which sonnet?" though

he knew, and Milly quoted a line or two. "On the Refusal of Aid between Nations." And so Mary was involved in distinctions, distinctions between then and now, the letter and the spirit, the aids of brotherhood and the positive committal to violence and slaughter. And they trailed off to a desultory discussion on the nations and the deeper common measure of humanity. And poor Mary became weary and baffled.

At last she said to Geoffrey: "Let it be romantic then. Make it noble in your own way. But how can you? All the poor, ignorant people taken away to be killed!"

Tamely enough, he said: "It's a question of the alternative."

And the hopelessness of continuing the discussion oppressed them. Milly inquired brightly about his visit to Grasmere, and wanted to know how all these great events impressed Miss Drew. She had quite an intelligent interest in the impact of terrific realities upon one accustomed to big things in the "mimic life." Geoffrey was not disposed to consider Miss Drew as one of a race apart. "Very much like you and me," he said, and repeated variants of this. When Milly had gone, Geoffrey said to Mary: "The hearty lass is no fool." Mary stared at him and, lacking interest or freshness, did not reply.

CHAPTER XI

RECRIMINATIONS

"It's one in the eye for us, of course," said Attar, "but we shall get over it all right now."

He sat with Geoffrey and Burke in the tea-shop which was a little arid and desolate on this late afternoon of summer. They drank their tea gloomily, but Burke had had sufficient interest in life to order currant tea-cake and Attar was particular in insisting upon China tea. They were of the *Herald,* but not in its inner council, and while loyalty compelled them to present an implacable front to the outsider, they could criticize and even blaspheme among themselves.

"We shall never hear the last of it," said Burke.

"Of what?" said Attar.

"Of those damned leaders."

"After all," Geoffrey said, "it was only half a dozen sentences in them."

"The blockheads that we are dealing with," said Attar, "never carry away more than two sentences."

"And that's true," said Burke. He ordered another tea-cake. "I don't care."

"We've the knack of rubbing people the wrong

way," said Attar. "I grant that we're commonly in the right, but we always rile 'em with those half-dozen sentences."

"What good are you if you're always thinking of their feelings?" said Geoffrey.

"And that's true," said Burke.

"Well, Tim," said Geoffrey, "what are we all going to do? All this cry of war makes me feel what a peaceful man I am. I'm not an adventurer. I begin to see how delightful it is to be a drudge. I want to go on quietly writing plays and novels—just imagining nice little domestic upsets and being terrifically tragic about them, or else comic. And now comes this frightful distraction. Can I just stand aside? Can I say I won't fight and that we're all brothers? What if we all did that? I'm being obvious, I know. I want to get the obvious right. I distrust all I hear about Germany and Germany's designs. I take Great Britain's impeccability with a grain of salt. But—damn it, man—they've got going now and what'll happen if they walk over us all? When the world's reshaping are we to boggle over a few million lives? If we are to be philanthropists let's conceive on the grand scale. Why! What are lives? If you're going to build a Forth Bridge it'll kill hundreds. A railway in Africa means thousands of lives in its construction. What sort of a world would you have? Human life! Let's be big."

"Go ahead," said Burke; "you've thought it all out."

"I've never thought of it till now that I begin to

speak," said Geoffrey. "I couldn't start thinking. I'm trying to think now."

"Your psychology is interesting," said Attar.

"Don't dry him up," said Burke.

And Geoffrey would not be dried up. "What I want," he said, "is a simple issue, and, begad, I hardly care what it is. I've tried to imagine myself a primitive Christian telling these folk to put up their swords —acquiescing with an angelic smile when they trampled over me. Passive resistance! Conscientious objection! Why shouldn't the saints among us make a stand? And, mind you, Attar, I despise a man who isn't a saint. That is to say, I despise him if, consciously, he says, 'That man's better than I and I could be like that.' If he's swifter or stronger than I, I'll cheer him on and do the best I can, humbly, with what I have of swiftness and strength. D'you see?"

"Partly," said Attar.

"Well, I've, so to say, gone up and looked at this holy, non-resistance stunt and I can't stand it. It's not for me. I want to know what it means. And I'm told that Tolstoy says you mustn't lay your hands on a drunken man who would kill a child. Then Tolstoy's a fool. One of the greatest of men, but a fool. I rejoice that there are such fools. I want a world of all sorts. I want extremes though I'm moderate myself."

"D'you want bloody murderers in it too?" said Burke.

"I suppose so. It seems better fun."

"And how," said Attar, "if your reason told you

that in this quarrel with Germany we were in the wrong?"

"I'm as English as they're made," said Geoffrey. "Back of it all there's that conviction that we're sound. I hate their Imperial rot. Our rhetoric about it is nauseating. But—I'd only whisper it among friends—we're a bit better than the Germans. Not much. We've all their vices in a minor degree. It's enough to count. I'm thinking it might be enough to die for if you're disposed that way."

"What's the practical issue in your case?" said Attar.

"Bother your practical issues. I'm just having a good jaw."

"What are you going to do, Burke?" said Attar.

"I've sent in my name to the Admiralty."

"Offering to take on the Grand Fleet?" said Attar.

"I'm an engineer, you know. They may want us."

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "I talk and talk and Burke does something. I've kept telling myself that I mustn't let my feelings carry me away. Why! When I hear a distant band I begin to tremble—to tingle, I mean. And then it comes nearer and I see a ramshackle lot of fellows marching behind it. Rabbits! They'll go down before Germany like rabbits, I dare say. And I feel I ought to be with them. What right have I to luxuriate in sentimental feelings about these men? I've been skeptical and aloof and felt it was very fine of the poor devils. I've had sentimental tears in my eyes, but deep down I've been wondering what

I'm going to do. The old *Herald* would get on well enough without me."

Attar said: "One seems to have built up a sort of individual existence, and now—you're to become one of a roaring crowd. And then you're to be a number, a uniform. Between friends—as you say, Arden—I've all sorts of disputing impulses. Some are despicable enough. Fighting is for soldiers, for pros. Let the peasants go. But there's an old tag keeps coming into my head."

"What's that?"

"*Noblesse oblige.* Somehow I don't like ranking myself with the bourgeoisie."

"It's going to be all together this time," said Burke.

And then Imalian dropped in and joined them. He had a parcel under his arm, and Attar demanded that he should show it. Imalian demurred, but produced his fine edition deprecatingly. "I shall go on fiddling while Rome burns," he said. He resented the war as a horrid piece of barbarism, a very serious annoyance indeed. This was not all, of course; you suspected him of deep racial sympathies, of ideals that he would not share with you. Here, with a sad playfulness, he posed as the typical quiet citizen who did not wish harm to anybody, only demanding—if so moderate an appeal might be called a demand—a place where he and other peace-loving people might dwell unmolested. And, indeed, something of this is at the heart of many of us; a quiet country for quiet people is wanted.

An exclamation from Attar drew Geoffrey's eyes

to the door. There was Bonsor with his friend Riley, and they came to a table beside that of the others, very much with the air of joining them. Attar and Riley had exchanged cool nods, and Attar had had time to mutter to Geoffrey: "Worse than Bonsor." However, for a time they all observed the forms, and it was a pretty mild remark by Bonsor that fired the train. It was couched almost as a compliment, but of that unhappy variety which implies the removal of scales from eyes that had been wantonly blind. And Riley grossly, rudely, said: "I suppose Lindsay sees at last which side his bread is buttered on."

Geoffrey said: "Oh, take that man away."

And then a hubbub burst out; every one was talking. Riley was strident, Burke contributed a deep roar, Imalian, hastily parceling up his volume, was stemming with irony the flood of Bonsor's aimless eloquence. Geoffrey interjected an occasional insult, while Attar tried to restrain him, suggesting, however, that an examination of Riley's bumps would be very interesting. The classical allusion was lost on the company. There was so much noise that the dispute overflowed, and outsiders took some share in it. "Hardly dignified, this," said Attar, but it was difficult to withdraw. A stranger, intervening, wished to know whether a majority of the *Herald* shares were not held by Germans, and whether the leaders were not written by men of German extraction. "Don't answer the fool," said Burke, but the man kept reiterating: "Is that the case?" Attar said, "I can

assure you, sir, that several drunken men have said so."

Riley bawled out that there would have been some excuse for them if they had been Germans. It was the unpatriotic blindness of Englishmen that distressed him. "You would not listen," he said, "you would not prepare, you would do nothing——" "Except cry Peace, Peace, when there was no Peace," intervened Bonsor finely.

Attar said: "The point is, I understand, that we didn't know this war was coming and did nothing to prepare for it."

"That's one point," said Riley, "but——"

Attar pursued: "You did know it was coming. What did you do?"

"You received warnings enough," said Bonsor, and Riley, slightly disconcerted, said "Deaf and blind."

"No, no," said Attar. "Stick to the point. I was too dense to see that war must come. You saw it clearly. What did you do?"

"What could we do?" said Riley. "I'm not the editor of a leading provincial paper."

"Let's grant that you couldn't do much. What did you do?"

"This is totally irrelevant," said Riley. "You're just drawing a red herring across the trail. At the best you were hopelessly, ridiculously mistaken. You wouldn't listen to the most solemn assurances from those who knew——"

"Come, now," said Attar; "nobody knew. Ob-

viously there was some chance of war and the *Herald* underestimated the chance. The stupid people were right, as they often are, but that doesn't make them wise. War or peace? It's a toss-up. Heads or tails? You cry war and it is, and you have the illusion of wisdom. We staked on peace and were wrong. The easy course was to be moderately bellicose, but we chose the difficult, courageous one, and tried to keep the peace."

"Sir," called out an indignant stranger, "do you call Lord Roberts one of the stupid people?"

"I call him a fine old fellow," said Attar, "and one of the half-dozen men in the country that might reproach us with some point. But the conversation is becoming general and I came here for a quiet cup of tea."

"Yes, you've a genius for getting out of things, you *Herald* people," said Riley bitterly. "You make the most idiotic mistakes and then you get away in a cloud of words."

"Ah! yes," said Attar pleasantly, "it must be deuced annoying to you when you see us escaping again. You thought we'd dished ourselves and we haven't. And what's more, Riley, we aren't going to. We're as sound as a bell. Your attempt to make us out traitors or semi-traitors will be a failure. Incidentally, it's the meanest and most despicable move that we've had in these parts. Go home and weep, man. You'll be proud to know us yet. There isn't a paper in the land that will run this war better than we. I can say so because it won't be my doing. Don't

come hectoring here, Riley. We're as loyal as you and not such fools."

It was a remarkable outburst for the well-balanced Attar, and Riley and Bonsor shook with rage. They both talked together, and Bonsor, never incisive, dominated by loudness. Attar had touched the point shrewdly; the *Herald* was getting away again, and its enemies did believe that it had committed itself in these days preceding the war. Riley brought them back to this. He shouted incriminating sentences from leaders, and Bonsor, less informed, had to fall back into the chorus. "Do you justify that?" cried Riley, and Bonsor echoed, "Yes, what d'you say to that?"

"Got a bit nasty, did we?" said Attar calmly. "My dear men, d'you seriously think I'm going to contend for the verbal inspiration of the *Herald*. Like every other paper it's crammed with blunders of every description. It's written by men in all sorts of moods. Sometimes they're passionate moods and indiscretions pop out. We're not all gods or angels. You must take us in bulk. Judge the wise man by his chance word and he's a fool. You want us to say rash things, to goad us to the extreme and then to judge us. I hope I'm not becoming apologetic. I just want to help you to a point of view."

Riley said: "You've no such thing as editorial supervision, then?"

"Bravo, Riley," said Attar; "that's the most intelligent thing you've said yet. But even the editor's a human being. Theoretically he's the king who can do

no wrong. Actually we rejoice in him as a gallant, Quixotic gentleman. That among other things. Ah! What a ludicrous myth you've made of the editor of the *Herald!* And you try to detach us, to bring us over to your mean dullness; you want us to wink and say that, of course, we have to conform, but it's all madness. No, Riley. No, Bonsor."

Inevitably the circle had enlarged, and there was a muttering fringe to it. The times were strange, and conventional manners relaxed. "All I can say is I wouldn't pollute my house with the rag," cried an angry citizen, and Attar said, "Really, sir? Your house is charming. I'm sure, but you must feel very uncomfortable when you go home drunk." But Geoffrey broke in here. "You remind me, sir," he said, "of an old story. A gentleman was showing a philosopher over his house. It was a beautiful house, all spick and span. And the philosopher spat in the gentleman's face. 'Pardon me,' he said, 'but there was no other place!'"

There was a pause and a splutter of laughter, and the citizen cried: "Do you mean to insult me?"

"Well, what d'you think?" said Burke.

But now an earnest little man intervened. He had always had a high regard for the *Herald,* had read it regularly for thirty-three—no, thirty-four—years, admired its literary style, considered its market reports sound, but its theater notices too severe—that by the way. "I am a Liberal," he pursued, "and have voted steadily on the Liberal side. I don't say the leaders are not able, but—the attitude towards capital, now;

the encouragement of the unreasonable encroachments of labor——" and so on. As to the war, he must confess that he was reluctant to believe——

"Poor little devil," interjected Burke.

Attar said: "I take you, sir. Your moderation does you credit. But why should we mold ourselves on you? There are lots of sorts in the world."

It appeared that this Liberal regarded himself as representing the enlightened sense of the community. He had supported the *Herald* and it was not too much to ask that the *Herald* should support him. If it failed to do so—his gesture implied that this was at its own risk.

"You mean that we are to kow-tow to our customers?" said Attar. "To give the public what it wants?"

"I am not the public," said the Liberal, "but you must acknowledge some obligation—yes, and some responsibility to your party."

"Damn the party," said Geoffrey.

"You daren't say that in your paper," cried Bonsor.

"We say it every day."

"It amounts to this," said Riley, "that they represent nothing but themselves. They live in a little hothouse, forcing opinions."

Another voice boomed out: "They're like the Bourbons: they learn nothing and they forget nothing."

"There seems to be some slight contradiction here," said Attar, leaning forward to catch sight of the owner of the voice. "You're giving us all the virtues—initiative and endurance too, independence and loyalty."

"You'll have your windows broken yet," bawled a coarse voice.

"Ah! well!" said Attar, "there's an argument that we can all understand. I sympathize with that hearty gentleman. He believes that we're in German pay, no doubt. Simple melodrama is his line. A good, bellowing patriot, are you, sir? Qualification shows the cloven hoof? Well, if you'll sing the right songs and keep your hands clean I'm with you. Keep it pure. Why not join us in a bit of idealism? Why, you fools, we're all on one side. We're something better than buccaneers now. The old songs are good, but we've got to make some new ones. Riley, I've been rude to you and I shall be again, but I'm conscious now that we've infinite things in common. Here's a big war coming, and it'll be a strain such as we've never suffered before. Great Heavens! It's the easiest thing in the world to say, 'I've been wrong. Let's start again'; it's infinitely difficult to go halfway. We were blind, you say. We didn't foresee this tremendous explosion. It's very much a matter of temperament. We lacked faith in melodrama. Don't let's waste ourselves in recriminations, you damned fool. What's before us? I think we'll pull through, but who can tell? We may all be beaten in a month."

"The man who says so is a traitor," shouted Riley, and there was a confused mutter of assent. A voice cried: "If we're beaten, it's thanks to you."

"The man who says so is a traitor?" repeated Attar. "But I think the man who daren't face it is a coward. In the meantime we'll hope and trust."

He rose and Geoffrey and Imalian followed him. "Coming, Burke?" said Geoffrey, but Burke ordered a second pot of tea and another tea-cake. He preferred to remain among the enemy rather than to give the impression of a general retreat. Attar bowed to the company with some ceremony, and one or two said "Good afternoon," but generally it was a sullen silence. On the way upstairs Imalian congratulated Attar. "What a set of savages," he said. He hugged his book; there was yet some stability in the world.

Geoffrey went home to Mary, and his consciousness of the scene was strong enough to overcome his reluctance to speak to her about it. Perhaps he desired, too, to remind her that the *Herald* was one of the martyrs. He praised Attar whole-heartedly, and she smiled a little at Burke settling down to his third tea-cake on the point of honor. "Or was he merely hungry?" she said. "Even to be hungry in the circumstances would be a merit," said Geoffrey. He had particularly admired Attar's appeal to be judged "in bulk" and not by the incriminating extreme. He quoted this to Mary and she said: "But you judge murderers so." She was a disconcerting person.

CHAPTER XII

THE OTHER EXTREME

They brought a card to Geoffrey in his room at the office and he conned the name of Mr. Arnold Gray doubtfully. At a newspaper office strangers are not received with enthusiasm, but neither are they dismissed with contumely; they may have the root of some matter in them. Mr. Gray was presently revealed as a dark, pale young man of twenty-five or so with gentle, impulsive manners and a measure of gracefulness in person and dress. He mentioned the name of a common acquaintance, and then Geoffrey remembered his promise to advise upon journalism and the literary career, or, at least, to talk of them. Often enough his good nature had induced him to consent to interviews with young men or women who wanted to find a royal road to success, and he had been flattered at the implication and rather enjoyed making his pronouncements. Now he had become a little doubtful of his formulas of the occasion, which, it seemed, led no whither. It was easy enough to talk to the young people, even to make suggestions, and when he had time and the young man was not impossible, Geoffrey would ask him to lunch and they would get on together swimmingly. It was pleasant, and Geoffrey would have liked to believe that he was

inspiring, but it was hardly business. Many of the young people wanted to get on the *Herald* in some capacity, and he would insinuate that this was not so easy as they might suppose. The obvious interest in the work of literary editor—as they called it—would sometimes bring a delicate shade of embarrassment to the relation.

Mr. Arnold Gray opened out very much as others had done, and on the surface his qualifications were above the average. He fumbled in a breast pocket: "I ventured—I've brought you," he said, "a few things." They were both manuscript and printed; he had had certain mild successes in getting things accepted. "Of course I've no right to take up your time," he said—the usual diffidence and the usual expectation that it would be overruled. Geoffrey, too, advanced his share of the diffidences; he was modest enough on these occasions. He took the papers and was relieved to see that they were not voluminous. With a fair show of readiness he offered to read them and give an opinion of what they pointed to in practical journalism. "That's what you want, I suppose?" said Geoffrey.

It seemed that this was part but not all. Gray wanted the opinion to go beyond that. "Journalism, of course," he said. "We have to take to that, but there are one or two things here—sketches and poems —on which I should like a critical opinion—a really critical opinion."

Geoffrey's eyes had strayed over a sentence or two and now he read a passage with attention. "I should

pronounce with more confidence," he said, "on the narrower issue. But anyhow you don't want an opinion restricted to these, I think. You want to know where you're going or how big you are—whether you're a genius or not. I can't tell you. I should have a better chance if I knew your character and what you do every day and why you do it, and whether you can stick things out and so on. These bits of writing may not help me much."

Gray was a little dashed. "I don't see what my private life has to do with it," he said. "I would rather be judged on these."

"Very well," said Geoffrey, "I'll read them and let you know what I think." He made a slight movement which might have been taken as an indication that the interview was over, but Gray did not stir. "I'm quite ready to answer any personal questions," he said.

"Ah!" said Geoffrey, "but I'm not ready to ask 'em."

He rose and Gray followed slowly. They stared at one another, and then Gray began to thank him effusively. "There is one thing that strikes me," said Geoffrey, "though I'm not sure that it's relevant."

"What is it?"

"Isn't it an odd time to go into this?"

"Why?"

"Some of us are pretty well obsessed by the war."

Gray said: "I don't intend to take any notice of the war."

"Oh, come!" said Geoffrey.

"I had hoped that you would sympathize with that attitude, Mr. Arden."

"I find it difficult to realize," said Geoffrey.

"I think that, as far as possible, we should not let it make any difference. I mean to go on just as before."

"My young friend, how the devil can you?"

Gray quoted Meredith—a fine epigram about the soul being above the baser mischances, and Geoffrey reminded him that Meredith had warned us to arm against Germany—the Germany that he knew and loved. But Gray insisted that with the Victorian writers—"and Meredith was eminently Victorian"—you must take the gold and reject the dross. It was delivered loftily, and Geoffrey was slightly amused and conscious of an incipient personal opposition. He didn't want this, and, indeed, Gray's youthful assertiveness was not without charm. He wondered whether Mary would like him and could imagine her kindling generously though she was strict on the point of manners and Gray's were more assured than safe. The poor lad might have a difficult time before him; he was, so to say, riding for a fall, and Geoffrey wished to be kind. After all, he was not so firmly planted that he could afford to slight any sincere conviction, and here was a man who might have volunteered in the first batch or might struggle against compulsion to the last.

"Are you in favor of this war?" said Gray, and Geoffrey found himself compelled to labor a case. He was ranging himself, he was defining, and he could

not do it with enthusiasm. Gray was not afflicted with doubts, and it appeared that he had a lively contempt for politicians with the exception of one or two labor men. He had glib platitudes about secret diplomacy, and he quoted the humanists smugly enough. Geoffrey was annoyed with himself, for he knew he wasn't quite fair. Most of us, however sincere, rely on formulas; you cannot attain the freshness of spirit every time. He asked himself how he would have got on with this young man if there had been no war to confuse the issue of the literary aspiration, and doubtless by this time he would have been asking him to lunch. And he wasn't getting at the man's message, his point of view; he was evading him.

Suddenly Geoffrey said: "What'll you do if conscription comes?" and Gray bristled at this. "Resist it to the death," he said emphatically, and it was clear that this was very much in his mind. This was the real preoccupation, and not the concern with literature and the literary career. He began an argument on the inexpediency of war from the social and political point of view and it blended confusingly with one on the needlessness of this war. It struck Geoffrey as able in a haphazard way; you had to agree with most of it though it seemed that they were missing links. But Geoffrey was conscious that feeling, all the time, was swaying both of them; neither was capable of pure reason. We waver over a decision and when it is made our loyalties grow until we are ready to die for it.

Gray began to talk about Christ, and the Christian

ideal, and when he faltered and blushed over it Geoffrey began to like him better. "Of course," Gray said —and the "of course" was not without its humor— "I am not dogmatically a Christian." And Geoffrey agreed that the world wanted a great infusion of Christianity now. The difficulty was that if one side maintained Christian ideals and the other didn't, the idealists might be extinguished. "We can't let the Germans walk over the world and take what they want," he said, and, shrewdly enough, Gray replied: "That's just what the Germans are saying of us." He began to develop an argument that while it was best to have Christian ideals all round, it was better to have them on one side than not at all, just as one-sided free trade was better than nothing. Geoffrey grew restive under this, and when Gray asked him if it wouldn't be a noble experiment he said wearily, and hating his formula, that it wasn't practical politics. "Practical!" said Gray with contempt, and then he brought in the word "pusillanimous" almost stingingly. With what patience he could assume Geoffrey suggested that even idealists must have a practical and opportunist policy as well as the ideals. They must incline one way or another, and, so to say, couldn't always stalk out when the division bell rang. They were not getting very near to one another, and it didn't advance matters for Gray to utter a sententious warning about the inevitable defilement of touching pitch.

"So the pure in heart are to stand aloof while the world is destroyed," said Geoffrey. He admitted the implication that we are better than the Germans or at

least moving on better lines. "Insular prejudice," interjected Gray, and Geoffrey asked him whether he really believed that there was no such thing as national right or wrong, whether nations at all times were equally innocent and equally guilty. It seemed that Gray was skeptical about our diplomatic case; but, said Geoffrey, "suppose that we are clearly in the right and that they are confessed bandits. Would you fight then?" Gray shook his head. "Then," said Geoffrey, "it's some sort of personal nicety that prevents you."

"You mean I'm a coward?" said Gray.

"Nothing of the kind," said Geoffrey.

"Quite simply I believe that to turn the other cheek is the highest philosophy; and it isn't only for domestic occasions, it's for all times and all cases. There never was a case worth a war."

"Was there ever a case worth a strike?" said Geoffrey.

"There isn't an analogy."

"What's the essential difference?"

"The shedding of blood. Human life."

"You think too much of human life," said Geoffrey, "and too little. What are we—you and I? What are a thousand million of us in the sight of God? Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His marking it? But many sparrows fall to the ground."

"You and I, here and now," said Gray, "must deal justly and kindly with one another. If you're here and I'm in Germany is the obligation less?"

"Considerably less, I think," said Geoffrey, "but

not altogether gone. I reject such a test of personal relation. I see a horde of savages streaming across Belgium, sacking and shooting. With any of them, standing in your place, I might be friendly. As it is I would strike him down to prevent a worse thing happening."

"Ah!" said Gray, "you listen to these calumnies."

"I hate to believe that these things are true," said Geoffrey. "I hate the people who believe them readily and eagerly. This war is a nightmare to me. Its coming was a triumph for the stupid people who said it must come. Now, after the stupid, come the malignant, and they're right too. These were calumnies and they're coming true."

"I see more than ever the need for us," said Gray. "Just and honorable men like you are carried away. We shall uphold peace and charity in the world or they will be forgotten. And you must always remember this: that we claim the right to decide on our own actions."

"That's the point, I suppose," said Geoffrey.

"We stand for liberty."

Impatiently Geoffrey said, "You let words control you. Literature is the control of words."

The man was untouched, he was inexorable, and he had made more impression on Geoffrey than Geoffrey on him. And yet he had helped to shape, to range. Geoffrey saw in him a fervour that had its element—and a strong element—of pugnacity in it. His lips compressed, his eyes flashed, he had the fighting spirit. In the time to come he would suffer bravely. It would

be absurd to call such a man a coward, and yet it might be that far back in the sources of things some instinct of timidity had begun to shape his course. Committed to it, the essential toughness of fiber was there. And in the martyrs it is not the meekness but the toughness that matters. The meekness is a wonderful gloss, a traditional badge assumed and maintained while deep in them is that obdurate, pugnacious, "I will not," the complement to the will that moves the world.

They did not pursue the argument further, and Geoffrey had been conscious that his own side of it had been in part experimental. He had warmed towards the young man as their differences became more acute. Their handshake, finally, had something of the magnanimity that may be seen at the end of a bout in the ring when the bruisers are not too groggy. "I'm afraid," said Gray dejectedly, "you'll think me—I mean this will hardly prejudice you in favor of——"

He had been tactless, but he was a man to glory in his tactlessness. "I shall read your stuff with all the more interest," said Geoffrey. "I like a man to hold his end up, and nowadays it seems a chance which side one's on." It was a friendly, incautious concession. Gray said: "That's so with you, I suppose. I—those I am with are firm as a rock."

"So are the German militarists, I believe," said Geoffrey. He laughed cheerfully but Gray kept very solemn. However, he looked round the room with some interest before he went. He asked permission to

look at the titles of the books, and turned a mystified, owl-like gaze upon Geoffrey as one who specialized on music, the poor-law, South America, and political biography. Geoffrey would have left it at that, but some residue of conscience induced him to explain that all this was merely a library overflow. Gray went off rather wistfully. As Geoffrey said, he had kept his end up; he had even imposed his personality here, but he was unsatisfied. In those days the perturbations were always in excess of the solaces.

And then Burke came in and he was a sort of tonic. He made Geoffrey's sympathies with Gray seem very filmy, and yet occasionally he stimulated them; Burke's downright world was not the only one. He told him about Gray, whom Burke insisted upon regarding as a decadent poet. He belonged to "that lot," and the distinction between the decadent and the Tolstoyan, for instance, was not worth making in these times. "Are we already given over to the drill-sergeant?" groaned Geoffrey, and Burke said, "Practically." He was a Philistine, of course, and perhaps sincerely rather than unconsciously so; he was capable of the humorous view. With some shrewdness, and stimulated by Geoffrey's explanations, he said: "I know the kind. He won't have anybody beating *him* at humility." Certainly it was a relief to talk to Burke, yet even with him Geoffrey felt that he was to be tossed to and fro like a shuttlecock between extreme, contending parties. It was, for a time and in a measure, his fate. He couldn't bridle his tongue in those early days, and so he found himself decried as a

pro-German or cold-shouldered as a lukewarm Englishman; he, with his romantic passion for England, was insulted by little cotton-spinners who thought that the greatest need in our domestic policy was to keep the operatives down. He was insulted for spontaneous humanity, for common sense, sometimes for an impatient indiscretion. And then he went home to Mary, and she would sit in silence, gazing, as it might be, at the river of blood between them. Not always, for she would be eagerly sympathetic sometimes; she would even talk of the military operations.

To Geoffrey the idea of logical ruthlessness had always been attractive and he played with it now. He had scandalized Burke by suggesting that war might be shortened and simplified by killing the prisoners, or even your own severely wounded. Of course, it couldn't be done, or couldn't till some race of immoral intellectuals got power. And wasn't it possible that in some struggle for the domination of the world the issue might be decided by arming the women? Of course, Geoffrey was all for peace and brotherhood, and these speculations of his appeared to Burke as the abnormal excesses of one who deprived himself of his natural bloodthirstiness. And presently these ruthless theories were to induce a more philosophic attitude to German implacabilities than that of some of his fellows; not to the mere beastliness and cruelties, but to the larger issues of ruthless policy.

Burke, the good fellow, glared at him in some irritation of perplexity and he felt that he was wrong; the ingenious Attar was the man to appreciate niceties in

the brewing of a hell-broth. And he had to justify himself to Burke; he always felt that. Yes, Burke was an Irishman with no nonsense about him. He was for the substance, not the shadow, and if you were sitting in a Celtic twilight he would propose to light the gas. Mary had once said that he was disloyal and, of course, she meant disloyal to a dim tradition, to some futility of the ideal that all Irishmen should be ready to die for. Geoffrey had denied it strenuously. For Burke to accept Sinn Fein he must be disloyal to himself. And he had a sort of pride in all those "bloody fools," his idealist countrymen; he regarded them almost fondly, as you might clever, wayward children.

And Mary had explicitly and almost formally withdrawn what she had said. Curiously, it was after Burke had explained the working of a machine to her. She hated machines and wanted to revert to primitive methods; she was an ardent supporter of Langdale linens and beaten coppers and all the primitive processes that Burke regarded as incredible trifling. It was by a sort of inspiration that he began to describe the working of a great machine, and he did it so "gently and faithfully"—as she said to Geoffrey afterwards—that it clouded her convictions. Burke's patient exposition revealed the idea of the machine in his mind as beautiful. It had nothing to do with industrial tyranny. And though Burke had told her that he had not described the machine quite as it was —that being beyond his power of penetrating to her comprehension—it seemed that her sense of the faith-

fulness of it all was deepened; he was not a materialist and the value was in the idea.

Burke did not understand her, and he confessed to Geoffrey that he felt himself to be like one of those savages who can only count up to five and have no ambition to extend their vocabulary. "I suppose I'm indolent, Arden; I'm not curious enough. Come to me on a definite thing within my ken and I'm no fool. Am I, now? There's something lacking. What you'd call the mystical? Your sister's beyond me. Beautiful. I see that."

He was a humble fellow. Geoffrey sounded him for a note of irony, even of skepticism, but they were not there. And now it appeared that he had accepted the simple alternatives in this war: "We must conquer or perish." It was what Geoffrey heard on every hand. It was a practical formula, and he saw himself accepting it as a working one. There are times when your skepticisms, your qualifications, may be put aside. Attar's "We may be beaten in a month," had startled him; it was the fine, clear pronouncement of the intellectual, and it had set him searching for alternatives, even for mitigations. To be beaten would not be the end of us, as the fanatics asserted, though it would be bad enough. The spirit of man, the spirit of Englishmen is not so brittle. The humiliation, the material burdens, the debacle of the inviolate, romantical pose would be dreadful to him as to his fellows, but they would not be the end. These dullards with their iron and brass may cripple but they cannot kill.

But now we were to become opportunists. With

Burke sitting there before him, imperturbably smoking a pipe, he was ready to argue that there was nothing for it but to imitate the action of the tiger, to stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, and disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage. He quoted this famous bluster of Shakespeare and Burke nodded approvingly. He truckled a little to Burke, he was not quite fair to Gray, or rather to his most generous idealization of him. "Yes," he said, "there's a fundamental stupidity in projecting yourself into the future —and the ideal is the future—when it's a practical policy that's wanted. And why dogmatize about the sacredness of human life? It's cheap enough when the world moves on the grand scale. It's our egoism that revolts; the destruction of our fellows in such an appalling analogy. It's good to have a cause to die for, no matter what—country, humanity, anything."

Burke, with Gray in his mind, humorously suggested vegetarianism.

"Ah, well!" said Geoffrey; "there are intelligent young people pointing out that races are mixed and that splendid humanitarians are left stranded without any particular country. I talk of England, but if you add Scotland and Wales—and what about Ireland?—your symbol does change a bit. But a loyalty, a romantic loyalty, to something."

"I'm an Irish utilitarian, meself," said Burke.

"I wouldn't mind having you beside me in a scrimmage," said Geoffrey.

"For as long as I see reason."

"Rubbish."

"Well, for as long as the fun lasts," said Burke.

They went out and lunched together pleasantly enough. "One talks big," said Geoffrey, "but there's still this habit of finding a comfortable corner."

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARING TO PLUNGE

GEOFFREY had not volunteered with the first rush, then. He had had the impulse to do so, but it was only one of his impulses and his was a questioning spirit. From his room at the office he saw the ragged columns of volunteers march through the streets headed by brass bands, with their thunderous appeal to the emotions. He thrilled to it; he shook with the anticipation, even the apprehension, of the time when he would march with them; and he delayed. There was something portentous about his deliberation that appealed to his humor. Men were pouring in and the authorities had more than they could handle; it did not matter whether you joined on Tuesday or on Thursday unless to your own boyish satisfaction. And he was one who could linger over the taste of things; he would not rush through the phases of an experience. He watched these hobbledehoy civilians march past, so solemnly and sheepishly and defiantly, and though they were his comrades he could contemplate them, for a time, from without. He could laugh at them and he was greatly moved; his eyes were sometimes dimmed with tears. The rough attempt at regularity threw into relief all the discrepancies of personality and tailoring. They were pathetic and immensely inspiring. The faith of it—the

faith of it! From their soft jobs—and every man, it seems, has had a soft job—they went to be roughly handled, straightened, drilled and trained to some sort of military competence. Then the unknown, the battlefields, wounds and death. Their brains might be flaming, doubts clutching their hearts, but they marched with an admirable composure. It occurred to him that he had never done justice to the idea of discipline. And, of course, it is one of the world's great dangers.

He encountered queues of men at the recruiting offices waiting their turn to enlist. One day he walked along a line, and, regarded critically, it didn't seem that the might of Germany had much to fear from these. They looked strangely small and shabby; they joked a little sometimes, they lounged, they spat; some looked sullen, and some appeared to be gazing at an object infinitely far away; many had the Briton's air of consciously making a fool of himself. He came to the end of the line and started, for there was the little man of the German restaurant. He looked defiant and apologetic too. He grinned faintly and said: "Ad to do it." And Geoffrey felt then that there had never been anything like this in the world before, that nothing had ever mattered so much, that to falter now would be baseness and misery. As he paused there, the little man looked at him inquiringly and muttered again: "Ad to." Geoffrey shook hands with him and hurried away.

He saw Lindsay that night and told him that he wanted to go. "I know I'm not essential here," he

said. "The war will take away half my work and the other half doesn't matter now." It was a rashness of depreciation. Lindsay looked at him keenly and kindly and said: "Why do you want to go? I don't say you are wrong." And Geoffrey, rather lamely, attempted some description of his feelings. They came out rather coldly and aridly. After all, they were feelings, and Lindsay was a man of rock demanding reasons and principles and an ultimate righteousness. He was to the community a mystical personage and legends accumulated about him; there he was quite simply, all the time, just demanding righteousness.

Geoffrey abandoned any attempt to recall emotions in tranquillity and shaped some patriotic formulas. Lindsay nodded and reflected, and Geoffrey knew well enough the direction of those reflections. It was "the paper" he was thinking about; that was the passion of his life. He reflected aloud: "We might lose Secretan."

"Secretan?" said Geoffrey in astonishment.

Lindsay said: "The age may be raised presently. There are some temperaments that cannot grow old. Secretan is romantic."

"Could I let Secretan go first?"

"These are trifles," said Lindsay. He was silent for a time and then: "We might want you." Geoffrey waited and he continued: "I cannot stand in your way. You must follow your conscience. The paper——"

He paused, and Geoffrey could have believed that

he had in his mind: Here is a man whose devotion is not absolute and I have no right to demand that it should be. Presently he went on: "The paper will miss you." He was complimentary and exceedingly kind. He offered to write to a personage about a commission. Geoffrey said that he meant to enlist, and Lindsay frowned over this. "Your intelligence should be of use," he said. "It isn't a matter of sentiment."

Geoffrey intimated some mistrust of himself, and Lindsay said: "That's your fault. You've never trusted yourself enough."

"The skeptical habit, I suppose," said Geoffrey, and Lindsay told him to try to acquire a dogmatic belief in himself.

"I do like the idea of working up from the ranks," said Geoffrey.

Lindsay groaned: "Ah, you romantics!" All the time Geoffrey had it in his mind that it would be easier to tell Mary that he was enlisting; that would appeal to her.

Outside the door he felt that he ought to have said something to Lindsay about "the paper"; it deserved something handsome, emotional, lyrical, and Lindsay ought to know how he felt about it. Yes, it was an annoying omission to be repaired some time; another man had taken his place in Lindsay's room. It would wait till to-morrow, anyhow.

Perhaps it was strange—was it strange?—that at these times his mind turned more to Mary than to Sibyl. Yet when he left Lindsay he went out into

the street and, turning homewards, he began to hum "The Girl I Left Behind me"; nothing grander, more exalted than that. Perhaps the spirit of it was rather complicated, but there were streaks of humility in his irony. He was an experimentalist in emotions, but he forgot himself readily enough when the pressure rose. And he had a useful vein of doggedness. To-night it occurred to him that he would call at the Wibberleys' for news of Sibyl, and when he reached the house, though he wanted to know about Sibyl, he found that he did not want the Wibberleys. Such an after-dinner call was not impracticable, but it was unusual, and he had so often vexed himself by boggling at the unusual, that he had now a fund of exasperation to carry him on. It seemed, too, that he must be a lukewarm lover indeed if he could not brave a slight ruffling of the spirit for her; and he did not believe himself to be that.

The Wibberleys were quite glad to see him, as people are when you break upon their evening torpor. They were both reading high-class books that were pointedly remote from the war; it seemed that they were still disposed to ignore the war, though, obviously, it was impossible to do that altogether. Grasmere was recalled, and the feverish days there that ought to have been so peaceful and Wordsworthian. They were still troubled by that reproachful shade, and Geoffrey suggested that Wordsworth had not always been Wordsworthian; that youth had flamed in him too; that if he were here now he would have been concerned with hosts other than the golden daf-

fodils. And so they got to "this deplorable war" which, it seems, might have been avoided with a little tact. The Wibberleys were not exactly opposed to the war (there must be no misunderstanding about that), but they wanted it to be waged in a gentlemanlike manner; the poor creatures were, in their way, romantic. In their presence, Geoffrey was conscious of a deepening brutality. "War cannot be waged faintly and decently," he said. "Look what's happening in Belgium."

The Wibberleys could not believe what was happening in Belgium, and, indeed, in those early days all generous and chivalrous spirits held to it that Germany was maligned. It was maligned in much, but the awful residuum of facts brought triumph to the malignant. And even then the pessimist might find a gloomy audience if he predicted the disintegration of humanity; this war has been vastly reassuring, for humanity has stood fast.

Matters were not at their worst yet, but Geoffrey was tempted to a little pounding of the shattered complacencies. It was a mild perversity that caused him to suggest that the fragilities represented by the Hague Conference would go, that compunctions would be stripped off one by one till ruthlessness and stark horror prevailed. "Then we should never have embarked on it," cried Wibberley, and Geoffrey's "What was the alternative?" left him fuming. And then, curiously, Geoffrey detected in Mrs. Wibberley some response to his mood. "We are in for it," she said decidedly, "and we shall have supped full of horrors

before we have done." Wibberley looked at her in some surprise and Geoffrey surmised that this was a new line for her. She was a woman who liked to be in the swim, and merely to sit at home reading the classics was not to be in any kind of swim. Wibberley, however, had more sense of responsibility; he was committed to a particular attitude at the club.

"The trouble is," said Geoffrey, "that in war it pays to strain the humane conventions to the breaking-point and a little beyond. You may lose your soul and win the war. Have you ever seen two well-matched teams play football, one with a lower standard of courtesy and law than the other? The more brutal side wins. You can decline to play with cads, but you can't decline to fight them. And if they begin to kick you in the stomach, must you stick to your fists?"

"You mean to suggest——"

"That if they break the rules we shall do the same."

Wibberley shook his head doubtfully. He was one of those who preferred feeble resistance to the uncomfortable inevitable rather than clear thinking and decisive action. "The important thing," said Geoffrey, "is to know what you're doing and call it by its right name—murder or whatever it may be. It may make us think more kindly of murderers."

And as Wibberley was opposed to capital punishment and had enlightened views on the treatment of the criminal, here was a way of escape for him.

All this was not to the point, and Geoffrey wanted to get away. He turned to Mrs. Wibberley and asked

her what had become of Miss Drew. Her "You don't know, either?" carried a suspicion of archness. They had no recent news, but she was to be at the Playgoers' Theater again this autumn and might be here rehearsing any time. Mrs. Wibberley had found her strangely uncommunicative. This hinted reproach, but it was modified with "Poor girl!" With some uneasiness, Geoffrey felt that this might be a hint of reproach to him. He was on the point of asking what the nature of any expected communication might be, but refrained. The parting was affable, Mrs. Wibberley inclining to graciousness and Wibberley to indulgence.

He went home seriously and let himself in with his latchkey. It was not very late, and he saw by the light in the sitting-room that Mary was there, as he went upstairs to wash his hands. She called out to him and they had a shouted colloquy about his requirements for supper; it was pleasant and reassuring. And then, as he toweled, he found himself reciting Shakespeare as he had done so often in his bedroom ever since he was a boy. This time his wayward, instinctive choice was Othello's renunciation of war, and he gave out some of the great phrases ringingly—

"The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war."

Glorious war! And how had it got this noble reputation? The evidence went to show that these old wars were horrible affairs without even the fragments of a discredited Hague Conference to mitigate them.

Was it a vast conspiracy, involving the poets? Or did they, indeed, find an overwhelming glory in this scorn of life which was, deeply, a pride of life? He heard Mary's voice calling to him to hasten if he would have hot food.

When he got downstairs he found Milly Warde with Mary, without her hat and very much at home. A tray was brought into the sitting-room and they ministered to him together. Milly said: "Didn't I hear you singing?" and he replied: "Spouting verse. An old habit." He looked at Mary smilingly, for it was yet a consciousness between them. "What was the verse this time?" said Milly; "I'm a tactless, curious person, and not afraid of asking questions."

He thundered some of Othello's lines at her, and Mary looked at him intently. "But you're not saying farewell to war," said Milly. "It's the other way?"

They both waited. "I shall have to go, I suppose," he said. The phrasing was pointedly unheroic, coming after the grandiose Shakespeare manner, but the fact was there. Milly glanced rapidly at Mary, who retained the vestiges of a smile.

Then Geoffrey was slightly disconcerted to see that Milly had clasped her hands and assumed what might be called a rapt expression; this is not putting it generously, but he didn't want to join in heroics with Milly, preferring with her the lower slopes of good fellowship.

And then he began to talk at large rather nervously. "I dare say it'll do some of us good," he said. "We want rousing. We can't all get a man's share of ad-

venture. A chosen few go to the ends of the earth while most of us never get away from the suburbs, but a war like this is a bit excessive. It's to burn down the house for a bit of roast pig. And we've death in the world anyhow. If we hadn't it might be necessary to invent it. We must fight for our side. Mary doesn't think so. There are no difficulties for her. She doesn't think much of our great possessions. All the dynasties, ramifications of politics, commerce, races, she puts aside. She belongs to a world of simple folk desiring peace. And you can't answer her. I'm like that, too, but when you find yourself out in the world it's different."

"Why do you talk like this?" said Mary.

"There are times," cried Geoffrey, "when one should talk freely, experimentally, according to the mood, and care nothing about recording angels. We're all so much afraid of committing ourselves, of being inconsistent. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that we should give every thought and feeling its chance. Now, I'm a bit of a Christian—among other things. I've advanced on that line—had a look at things from that point of view. Ah! how simple it would be if we were all Christians! There would be no war."

"That's obvious," said Milly. She was puzzled and disconcerted by him.

"Not quite so obvious as you think, Milly," he said. "I don't mean if the Germans were Christians, but if we were. We should just turn the other cheek and let them march over us if they wanted to. I've

thought about it and that's what I make Christianity to be. But, of course, we can't do that, and Christianity is far too big a thing to be abandoned suddenly. So we try to keep something of its spirit while we act clean against it. Or we throw the whole thing over. They're beginning to tell us in sermons now that 'Love your enemies' doesn't apply to Germans. And do you know what I heard the other day? 'Father, forgive them *not* for they know what they do.' Infamous travesty."

"They are doing things that cannot be forgiven," said Milly sullenly.

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "I can feel like that and yet, logically, it's absurd. There's no sense in forgiving a pin-prick and not forgiving a murder. Imagine a God who would forgive one and not the other! I'm only human. I'm beginning to hate the Germans quite in the orthodox way."

"Well, anyhow you're going?" said Milly.

"Don't hurry me," he said. "Let me have my sensations. Let me pretend that I'm hesitating on the brink. Do remember that I'm an artist."

"How can you talk like this while Mary's waiting to know?" said Milly.

"Mary does know," he said.

"Let him talk," said Mary. "I don't know everything."

"I hope I'm not conceding to bluster and convention," said Geoffrey. "There are people who bow before the storm and protest secretly, but I'd like to be honest. I hate most of what's said and written

about the war, and I look forward with horror to a world of drill, preparation, competition, afterwards. To be unforgiving, to be perpetually suspicious—there's no way out of it and it's horrible. You think I'm talking like a peace-at-any-price person, Milly. I'm nearly that, but not quite. And I'm a thousand miles away. I'm an artist—passionately on both sides; on the wrong side too. We are to be scorned and neglected in the hearty future. An opening for patriotic songs, no doubt, and allegorical statues of victory, I hope. But the man on both sides, the man who loves all—isn't it strange that Christ says nothing about the artist? He didn't know there was such a thing. And yet—they're an improvident lot, too. They live as the sparrows."

"But you're going?" said Milly.

"I'm going," he said, "there's no doubt about that. I mean to enlist to-morrow."

"Enlist?" cried Milly.

"Isn't that right?" he said. He shot a glance at Mary. "There's an argument against it. I'm intelligent enough to make an officer. I know. Don't bother me by repeating it. I've decided."

"It's splendid of you," said Milly. She had tears in her eyes.

"No, it's just simple," he said; "I'm pretty simple in the upshot. A certain amount of preliminary talk, no doubt." Milly's emotion made him uneasy and he was sincerely anxious to keep within hail of the matter-of-fact. And the two women, he knew, were reacting on one another. In opinion and policy they

might be far apart, but their emotions ran together. He had no room now for sentiment with Milly, and it was embarrassing to have her here with Mary; it made him cold and cautious. It was with a sort of moral indignation that he thought of Mary ready to acquiesce in his marrying the useful, faithful Milly, and ready to balk him of his spiritual adventure with the incalculable Sibyl. Poor Milly! In such a case the friendly compromise may be worse than nothing, and yet he was ready for friendship; it was only that plaguey sex that stood in the way.

And when she had gone, Mary was extraordinarily gentle and affectionate to him. "I can't do anything else," he said to her. "I must go." She said: "Of course you must go. I know that. Think of me as helping you all I can." And where, he wondered, was Sibyl in her mind?

CHAPTER XIV

ANTI-CLIMAX

"ANTI-CLIMAX," muttered Geoffrey. "Anti-climax. Good Lord."

He was returning from his medical examination, having been rejected, and he walked with a dull, even step, like a man slightly drunk who will take no chances. His rush up the stairs at the office had sometimes been a joke with his colleagues—"the aerial flight," Attar had called it—but to-day he went up like an automaton that would want winding up again directly. No tragical matter, of course, but for a young man—a youngish man; he corrected his thought rather bitterly—the physical degradation is humiliating. That wasn't all, however, for he was conscious, too, of a deep, obscure glow of relief that his honesty translated into a moral humiliation. He had taken a high hand with himself; he had delivered himself to the machine; and now it had cast him out again to his doubts and hesitations and all the struggling complexities of his nature. He had felt strong, but now he recalled the timidities of his youth. He had sometimes found it hard to follow the lead of the bold spirits, though he would not rank himself beneath them; he had known evasions, he had forced himself to the ordeal. As a youth he was eager to

excel, and yet on the cricket-field when he waited for his innings he had sometimes seen the rain begin with relief; perhaps there was faint chagrin at the lost opportunity, but he could not disguise from himself, though he must from others, that despicable relief that the nervous, self-conscious spirit feels in its effacement. The point of honor drove him on, and the knowledge of his deeper inclinations; it was characteristic that if he had the choice he would always bat first, and that then he would choose, if he could, to take the first ball. And yet in this shy, pulsating youth of his he had known the joys of fearlessness, of the streaming of the scarlet banner. "Get your blood up, Geoffrey," had been a family exhortation. There was the joke against him that once when he was a little boy confronted with a too liberal helping his mother had said: "Can't you eat your pudding, Geoff?" To which he had replied: "Wait till I get my spirits up." He would write masterpieces if he could but keep his spirits up.

He climbed heavily to his room and sat down at his desk to stare at the familiar chimney-stacks on the roof opposite. He was half-conscious of their detail and they looked dull to-day, but he remembered how in twilight an enthusiasm vaguely related to the plastic arts had seen them portentous and menacing. He had to think now, and, when he tried to abstract his mind from the recent impressions that were so vivid, irrelevancies intruded. Those chimney-stacks, for instance, and the man who was now cleaning the windows below them at the peril of his life; so it

always seems, and Geoffrey got up again to look down into the street to consider what the fall would be. Perhaps the man's wife would get him to join the army as the safer occupation. Had she ever seen him at his work and was she haunted by it? No doubt the danger is very much an illusion and the dangers of the battlefield are real.

If that fellow slipped and came upon the pavement a sack of bones, what a wonderful simplification it would be for him! Really he was quite handy if one wanted to realize the imminence of death. The gallant rabble trailing now up Market Street behind the brass band had yet but a distant, romantic connection with it, though they might get there first. And he might have been marching there. Perhaps he would march there yet.

The medical examination had been amusing up to a point. With three other men Geoffrey was told to strip, and the affair took on a queer resemblance to some preparation for athletics. As naked as new-born babes the four were set trotting round the room while the two doctors watched them, and then it seemed a very queer game indeed. It was a strange experience, a plunge into the unknown, and, though one or two of the men lacked charm in such physical intimacy—one was downright dirty—Geoffrey was slightly elated to find how calmly he could endure such an ordeal. The various soundings and probings were slightly disagreeable. His body was not being treated with respect, and he could not help remembering how differently he had been handled when a guinea had lubri-

cated the occasion. Of course these doctors were working hastily, and it was too much to expect that they should have solved the problem of manners. Trifles, trifles. He mustn't be sensitive now. Or yes. He must conceal a perfect delicacy of sensitiveness under a stoical exterior. This military life is a matter of exteriors and those of the civilized who endure it must have a refuge in irony. To hold the critical in abeyance is to cultivate the ironical. Thank God for irony.

He had hardly thought of rejection, but he became conscious of a doubt. Examinations that in the other cases had seemed almost perfunctory, became careful in his case, and he was cross-examined briefly about habits and endurances. To his astonishment he was rejected and he wanted to know why. It appeared that these doctors were unwilling to stray beyond their particular job, which was that of plain acceptance or rejection. However, one of them told Geoffrey that he had varicose veins. "I mustn't dispute it, of course," said Geoffrey, "but I can walk forty miles on the hills without finding it out." The two held a whispered consultation and then the elder said: "If you're keen you can have the operation. It's not a big thing. There's another point. You've a slight rupture. Didn't know, perhaps? I ought to tell you that your heart is only middling. So far as that goes we should have passed you, though."

There was an air of finality about this, but Geoffrey would not have it so. "Be good enough to tell me a little more," he said. "What do you advise?"

"Our business is to pass you or to reject you," said the other doctor. "We have rejected you."

A certain tension had arisen. The doctors were overworked and irritable, Geoffrey was affronted and irritable. "These are army methods, I suppose," he said. "Damn the army."

"Get out," said the younger doctor, but the elder one intervened with, "What's your grievance?"

"Your infernal manners," said Geoffrey.

"We haven't time for manners. What's the point?"

Geoffrey reflected. "I understand I could have these things put right. You say my heart's middling?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can't stop there. Do you mean tnat an operation would be dangerous?"

"I don't say that."

"What do you say?"

"It's your own business to decide. Consult a surgeon. Or an all round if you like, Burditt, for instance. I think you'd be all right."

"Thank you," said Geoffrey. "Can you put it in the form of chances—odds?"

"Oh! Well, ten to one you'd be all right."

"Five to one, anyway," said the younger man.

"Call it fifteen to two," said Geoffrey.

"There's another point," said the elder. "It's conceivable that if you're wounded badly you might have a poorer chance than some of the others."

"I see," said Geoffrey. "I'm greatly obliged to you."

The two doctors had relaxed a little. Perhaps this slight interruption of their routine had given them some relief. It was almost pleasantly that the younger said: "Still keen on it?" Geoffrey turned to look at him and melted a little himself as he noted the tired eyes of this sallow, sharp-featured young man lolling in his chair with a momentary clutch at rest and ease.

"Then," said Geoffrey, "the proper course is to consult a specialist."

"Quite the proper course," said the elder.

"The proper course appeals to you?" said the younger.

Geoffrey looked at him with interest. "I shouldn't join the army for fun."

The young doctor nodded. "Well," he said, "we may be passing men like you without compunction before we're through."

The sight of an orderly at the door seemed to touch a spring in the doctors, and their renewed activities excluded further acknowledgments or farewells. Geoffrey got away briskly, but fell very soon into a heavy meditation. On the facts of the case he was a decently eager volunteer disappointed, but he didn't feel like that. Indeed, he found it impossible to sort out his feelings; consternation, apprehension, and relief contended, and doggedly, sullenly, he tried to fix his mind on that proper course which is the clue in such labyrinths. His habit of qualifying suggested that the present, the particular experience, must not be merged altogether in the general, the axiomatic, but at the back of all there was an almost weary

acquiescence in his custom of trying to do the right thing. He must go to that specialist; and yet it occurred to him that even specialists will sometimes take a hint from the patient in practical matters.

He gazed at the chimney-stacks and decided that he would take a day or two to think things over; one's mind gets to right conclusions by subconscious ways. If he did consult any one it might as well be Burditt; it would be a simple matter to telephone to him and make an appointment. The telephone book lay on Geoffrey's desk and he looked up Burditt's number, though there was no present reason why he should do so. And the receiver stood on the desk too.

A civilized man, hating war and despising military enthusiasms, has no call to force himself into the heroic. His reason may tell him that as a good citizen —as a patriot, if you like—he must be staunch to his country while he believes it is, on the whole, on the side of righteousness. To rush for the adventure against his own nature and inclination would be a kind of vulgarity. But if you are naturally fearless and an adventurer? Would manners demand that the hero should school himself to mere duty? Must he, for instance, avoid the Victoria Cross and regard the D.S.O. as the extreme limit of decoration? Geoffrey was not without humor.

He had a decent excuse, certainly, for avoiding the whole thing. He had answered the call reasonably and promptly. He had fulfilled the conditions that he would exact from himself. And there was on the one hand a vision, even now forming itself, of terror

and agony, of hard and bitter ways to death; and on the other of the pleasant life, taking on an aspect strangely precious, of passion and romance. He was not of the heroic mold; he knew that very well. Your hero sounds his drums and trumpets boldly and cheerfully, he is not bothered by this cursed habit of introspection, he sleeps when he is tired, rises refreshed at the réveillé, lives in the moment, has unclouded hours. What would such a one say to this decent excuse, this excellent excuse? He would acquiesce, perhaps, but with chagrin, with lamentations on his luck.

Geoffrey had always been a little bothered by the heroic, and as a boy, when he fiercely idealized himself, he had wondered whether it would indeed be exacted of him. Perhaps it was all a matter of defective circulation. "Let us get our blood up," he said aloud, and he gave the desk a thump with his fist. It shook a slight, tremulous tingle out of the telephone bell. He took the receiver off the hook and gave Dr. Burditt's number. It appeared that Dr. Burditt was going away and would not be able to make an appointment at present, but "Wait a moment," said the voice, and then there was a pause which Geoffrey, with sham melodramatic humor, interpreted as heavy with fate. A strong, even, masculine voice broke it. If he could come across now Burditt would see him. "In ten minutes," said Geoffrey, and hurried over.

The examination was very much on the lines of that to which he had already submitted, and Geoffrey would

have liked to ask Burditt, but did not, whether there was much difference in such matters between the specialist and the intelligent general practitioner. Experience tells, no doubt, in the perception of fine shades, and in the delicate human machine fine shades matter. Geoffrey explained the circumstances, and Burditt nodded sympathetically. "What I want to know is this," said Geoffrey; "can my heart be good enough for service and not good enough to stand an operation?"

"Seems unlikely, doesn't it?" said Burditt.

And yet when Geoffrey went away he had not reached anything very definite. It came upon him annoyingly that he hadn't a clear formula to go on. Burditt had taken so much time over the examination that the finalities had been rather hurried, and now he and his car had disappeared. There had been a general air of reassurance wtih considerable qualifications, leaving, as it seemed to Geoffrey, a margin for the exercise of his own free will. "I've a reasonable excuse to get out of it?" he had said, and Burditt had replied, "An ample excuse."

"Give me your advice," said Geoffrey.

"I should have less apprehension about this operation than about the strain of army life generally. You'd get a commission?"

"No," said Geoffrey.

"I can't advise operation in the circumstances."

"Pardon my putting it so: what would you do yourself?"

Burditt gazed intently at Geoffrey and then his eyes

turned to the mantelpiece, where, following them, Geoffrey saw the photograph of a group of two or three children with mother and father. Burditt looked at this as though his family would help him to a decision. He was older now than the man represented there, he was worn and jaded, yet he seemed flushed and restless; the precision of his professional manner had gone. He turned again to Geoffrey. "What would I do? I would get at the devils at any cost."

"I don't go into it in that spirit," said Geoffrey.

Burditt stood like a man making a great effort. "Perhaps you are right," he said. He looked at his watch and started into activity. They went out into the street together.

It was lunch time, and Geoffrey paid one of his rare visits to his club, conscious as he was, and perhaps overconscious, of a smoldering hostility there that embraced even the insignificant upon the *Herald.* Yet now its attitude was correct, its spirit was exalted, and Round and the others had set the highest standard of intelligent commentary on the campaign. Politeness was its due and generally Geoffrey received it. The news he heard was that Burditt's son had been killed and that Burditt had taken an army appointment.

Entering the grill-room, the first man he saw was Sewell and he sat down beside him. Really, this was fate, it was a call, a decision of the gods. He had always thought that if anything of the kind were necessary, Sewell was the man for him; it was not only that he had the reputation for enormous com-

petence, but there was a personal sparkle about him that Geoffrey liked. Sparkle may not be precisely the quality you demand for one who is to make incursions into your inside, but a surgeon who wields the knife with a flourish is a diverting figure. Geoffrey had heard of Sewell operating before his students with gestures that approached levity; the knife waved aloft, the victim waiting, the nurses slightly scandalized, the audience appreciative. It was the swagger of a natural flamboyancy. He wore a handsome diamond ring unblushingly, he had been seen in trousers of almost a fancy pattern, he didn't seem to care whether in these matters of labeling he was quite a gentleman or not. There was the astonishing trait: he was a man of the middle class and not obsessed by the idea of being a strictly-patterned gentleman. A good fellow enough; Geoffrey had always liked Sewell. He wasn't vulgar. He had a natural charm struggling through bonds of manners and etiquette. He was one of the few Englishmen who could maintain gaiety. And always there was that astonishing competence. Geoffrey had once heard him say: "There isn't such a thing as brilliant surgery. Of course one man may work faster than another, or he may take more risks."

Sewell told him that he, too, was expecting an appointment. It would be interesting to see Sewell under stress of great calamity. He would face war in his own spirit, but what would be the aspect of that spirit? One could imagine beneficence with a gallant twist to it. They talked of Burditt. It was

his idea, Sewell said, to put his son in the army. The poor lad had not been very keen on it and the mother had opposed and opposed. Burditt had believed that war was coming; he had been fanatic on the subject of Germany. "I used to tell him it was all gammon," said Sewell, "and he got furiously prophetic. You wouldn't know now that he was any less blind than the rest of us; he never says 'I told you so.'"

Geoffrey mentioned that he had just seen him, and told what he had said of the Germans. "Yes," said Sewell, "he would like to fight and has been thinking of a commission in the line. He's given up the idea. But he's implacably anti-German."

"He may have to doctor their wounded," said Geoffrey.

"A wounded man is a wounded man," said Sewell. "You can't tie up an artery resentfully." He was in favor of making it up with Germany eventually. "We shall never brew a decent lager here," he said.

In the smoke-room, Geoffrey introduced his subject, and the arrangements were made in five minutes over a cup of coffee. The question of local anæsthetic was rather lightly dismissed. Sewell listened carefully to all that the other doctors had said, and his hand seemed to stray casually to Geoffrey's wrist as they sat side by side. He felt the pulse and said he thought it would be all right, that, anyhow, he would trust Gough, his anæsthetist, against the world in this matter. "He can tickle a dead man through," said Sewell cheerfully. It seemed an easy, friendly arrangement

and as good as done. With reserves of apprehension in his heart Geoffrey felt that it was not very difficult to be a man amongst men.

Mary listened steadily when he told her about it, and it did not appear to occur to her that he could do any less. If you thought it right to go to the war you must go if you could crawl there. Geoffrey had a glimpse of his sister, again, as an implacable creature, with all her fine sympathies. With perturbations and hesitations and a grim struggle you arrived at the point where she confidently awaited you. The confidence was a tribute, certainly, but so much was taken as a matter of course; a weak mortal looks for a little particular encouragement. He felt this and knew it was unworthy; he meant to live up to the ideal, and wondered whether a breakdown would find her ruthless in admonition or instantly and deeply in sympathy. He perceived that she was shyly resentful of the indignities that his body must suffer. She listened gravely to his rueful jocularities about finding himself to be an old crock. He pressed them whimsically, wilfully against her mood, as if in defense. In burlesque he quoted: "Phœbus Apollo was operated on for appendicitis yesterday and is doing well." She had a shrinking interest, certainly not morbid, in the operation. He wondered what Sewell would think of her idea of the temple defaced. "We are realists," he said, "whether we would or not." She bowed her head in assent.

Geoffrey spent a few days in uncomfortable anticipation. He was not one of those who can rule

their minds, dismissing the inopportune; there is none who can do so absolutely, but some can make a much better attempt than others. He had read a little sketch by Dixon Scott in which "The Shadow" of a coming operation of doubtful issue had stimulated the man to the keenest zest in the life still within his clutch; he had read and admired it, wondering whether, in like case, he could live up to its brilliant promise. He could not, and yet he believed it to be true; in humility he tried to encourage the baffled, wavering beginnings of what in the strong spirit would have been a free growth. He pottered about his rather dismal suburban garden in dull weather and made his poor, wistful attempt to emulate the heroic temperament, to exult in the high flame; but he failed in zest while conscious always of life's pathetic, precarious sweetness. Once or twice he puzzled Mary by an artificial buoyancy. She looked merely for steadfastness and that she should have.

He went into the nursing-home the night before in order to be ready early in the morning. And there he spent a night of deep discomfort; he couldn't get out of his head a phrase read casually in a newspaper about a famous criminal who had retired to rest the night before his execution "in a state of extreme depression." The moderation of this was arresting. And now he realized something of what it meant. Of course, the comparison was absurd, and his reason told him that these doctors would never let him run a great risk when it was really quite unnecessary. There was no cause for serious apprehension, but

reason has a poor chance against feeling in the night watches when you are tossing on a strange bed. In the arid little room and with his prospect he felt himself abandoned to this damned professionalism; there was slight comfort in thinking or even in muttering an oath or two. Perhaps other patients were feeling very much as he did, but he had no vision of them; it was at best a shadowy comradeship. He wished for the dawn, he drowsed a little, he awoke.

And then there came upon him, unprepared, the strong desire to be out of it. This was a burden greater than he could bear; it was useless for him to masquerade as a hero. And it was so entirely unnecessary. He was a fool, a wretched fool, and he had brought himself into an impossible position. He wasn't what he had pretended to be. Probably he was an exceptionally weak and morbidly sensitive man. Others couldn't feel like this before a trumpery operation. It was devilish awkward to cry off, though. It couldn't be done.

Despising himself, he knew it couldn't be done. Morally he was ready to do it, but it couldn't be done. Just a little bit of silly pride was in the way. You couldn't announce to a nurse that you had decided to slip out by the back door. To think of Sewell at the club was to know that hesitation now was ridiculous.

He had relapses. It was a miserable night. He was very bad when the idea came to him that this was like Christ's agony in the garden. The small compared with the great, of course; he was naturally apologetic for perceiving the analogy. Ah! and with

Christ it was the cry of weakness through strength. He knew, as Christ knew, that he must go through with it. He couldn't fail. It was only playing with an idea, after all.

In the morning he was much better and, though he felt horribly uncertain, he had moments of elation when he felt that he could keep his form all right. He shaved himself and was a little annoyed at a cut which he could not disguise. He was not quite natural, but he acted uncommonly well, and, with himself for audience, he brought off the points to admiration. He was gently jocular with the nurses, and with Sewell and Gough hit a note of casual interest in the performance. When he walked into the operating-room the surgeon and anæsthetist were talking together earnestly. It gave him a slight scare when they fell apart like conspirators discovered—so grossly did his mood exaggerate—but he had a good hold of himself. He got upon the operating table with a polite alacrity, and it was only at the last that he had a gasping doubt. Even then he was conscious of the hope that an instinctive gesture of repulsion, when they held the beastly stuff to his face, had not been seen. Ah! but he was letting his precious life slip away, he had made a monstrous mistake, they were choking him—it was that fellow Gough turning on the ether too soon—no, it was Sewell—Sewell was no gentleman—he had never thought Sewell a gentleman—to choke a man—well, did it matter?—death—?—did it matter?

CHAPTER XV

FOOLS IN COUNCIL

He came back to life, to a dim sense of life; sickness but life, pain but life; there was a faint, battered, shrouded elation somewhere in him, a shred of hope which he lost and recovered, forgot and tried to recollect. There was a deep pool of unconsciousness near him; he fancied it was just outside the bed and if he could have stirred at all he might have rolled over into it. He knew it was not the same as sleep; could it be death? He had feared death, but now when it was so near it seemed a slight matter, the severing of a hair, a little push. He trembled on the balance and death was merely a little push. He would sink deep into that pool, he would sink and sink. Yet in his mind there was the semblance of a choice; life or death for the asking. It didn't matter much, and it was curious to discover what a faint thing death is. Not very curious. He had always been on the side of life and he should choose life. If he fell into that pool there would be a splash and that was pain. He was in the clutches of pain, and pain forced him to live; it was not desire of life but the will to live.

Figures were moving about his bed. Nurses. Probably six or seven of them. Evidently it had been

an extraordinary case. There must be dozens of nurses there and the doctors had gone away for a long holiday. Sewell was not quite a gentleman. In this case he had behaved unpardonably and it would be embarrassing to meet him again. It would be best not to make any reference to what had happened. Sewell would understand, for he had perceptions; in other circumstances he might have been a gentleman. What the deuce is it all about?

Later he had the sensation of an austere rest. If he did not move all might be well. There was still pain, but now it seemed that pain was all over him and so it was bearable; the unbearable pain is when the parts get out of focus. Focus! He must be recovering when such a word as that came into his mind. And he had an idea too. Hell would be bearable if the heat were even all round. Quite a witty idea. He must tell Attar that. He was recovering. The whole thing was a trifle.

Thousands and thousands of men in France were going through this and worse—far worse. It was a damnable world. A brutal, horrible, damnable world. But now he was conscious of emphasis, of attitude; he couldn't really feel for all those poor devils. He was emerging from twilight into a daylight of platitude, he was trying to think what he ought to think. To sympathize strongly you must be strong, to imagine strongly you must be thrillingly alive. He was a poor, weak creature pumping up maudlin sentiment. No. They were his comrades lying there on the fields of France and he was wounded too;

he had taken his wound freely. Why shouldn't he drowse into any sentimental luxury? What had he to do with moral issues now? Can a man never have rest?

A nurse stood clearly and tangibly before him and he had a fleeting sense of the pleasures of convalescence; death and destruction were very remote. The nurse was not beautiful nor young, but she represented womanhood and comfort and order. It was a return to life and life craves joy. His mind turned to Sibyl, and it seemed that she had been strangely neglected. She had no regular place in his mind; she would possess it and then she would be forgotten. He permitted himself a childish, boyish castle of dreams; he looked towards the door, he listened for her footsteps. But it was not as a lover that he regarded himself now, but as a poor, stricken thing, less than a man, a child desiring comfort. He became very sentimental, and then, seeing the nurse placidly engaged in some work about the room, he had a healthy revolt. He even recalled the phase of David Copperfield and the elder Miss Larkins. And then he had a dim prescience of the day when he would demand a chop and a bottle of beer.

It burnt into his imagination that there is too much pain in this world. Too much already, and now comes this war to multiply it. He saw very clearly that the war ought not to be. He felt capable of extraordinary eloquence on the subject. He had the point of view and if he could but write now he would enforce it. His appeal would be beautiful and moving, but there

would be grim humor in the notion that the diplomats should all be harried into a nursing-home and cut about by ardent young surgeons who could surely find something to mend in their miserable carcasses. The point—the striking, illuminating point which had had no more than formal recognition—was that all this pain had never been taken into account. All sorts of glowing ambitions, of just resentments, gallantry, prudence; the platitudes about the horrors of war; but not this pain. Of course, you couldn't get pain out of the world; you couldn't let Germans trample over you because it would hurt to resist them; but where the councils of war are gathered together there should be some one there who knew. The greatest thing of all should not be forgotten.

He had a night of deep discomfort which changed to constant pain. As time wore on he felt that he was near the end of his resources and that he was no stoic. And then from an environment that had hardly been marked his nurse emerged. She was a small, quiet woman of middle age, strong in feature, gentle in expression. He saw that he could trust her, even with the confession of his weakness; and his appeal for help was not in vain. He groaned and writhed, but he had a friend. She was active in service, full of experiments, never at a loss. She never came to the end of her resources. She changed his position skilfully, she brought hot bottles for his feet and stomach, cooling lotions for his head. She gave him hot tea and even hot brandy; she never let him feel that the last card was played. His misery, his agony became

qualified with admiration. He admired her swift, elegant movements, the calmness that was never cold, the sympathy that yet incited him to effort. He began to idealize her and to pursue the interest. He told her of his admiration and she tried to explain all by her training, her faithfulness to a routine. He would not have that. "You're a marvelous nurse," he said; "you've the touch, the temperament, the spirit. You give me new conceptions of help, of human help. You're my friend; you'll always be my friend." He was greatly affected, and, for happy moments, his emotion transcended the pain. She would not have it that she was better than her fellows, she made mistakes, she had her lapses. And then she said that what merit she had as a nurse had come in answer to prayer. She was a simple woman, believing simply in the efficacy of prayer. They discussed the subject guardedly. It appeared that she was shy of it, dreading his skepticism or incredulity and instinctively aware of them. Presently he fell into a slight, precarious doze.

And as suffering begets succor, so, it seemed to him on reflection, even the miseries and abominations of war have their other side. His nurse would have gone to the war, but that she was not strong and had not been accepted. She would have gone because she was most wanted there, and he could imagine her away from the polite civilities of the nursing-home, where even pain seems to be muffled, and facing problems more tremendous than his own sleepless night. It humbled him and it exalted her. Think of her and

think of the war and she was not insignificant. Ajax defying the lightning is an arrogant fool; the nurse confronting the pain of the world is sublime.

Sewell came in daily and nodded over him; then there came the dressing of the wounds, which he didn't like at all, but he gained some confidence in his manhood through it, nevertheless. You may play at being a brave man so long that nature comes to your help; or is there always the subtle flaw that may bring disgrace in the unguarded moment?

He remembered gaining some credit with himself when, as a youth, he had a tooth pulled out. It was an obstinate tooth, and the old family dentist clutched and pulled and broke bits off and changed his instrument while Geoffrey sat in the chair apparently unmoved. He was deeply scared and apprehensive and shrank from the pain, but he didn't see what he could do but just sit there. The alternative was disgrace, a moral defeat; there wasn't an alternative. At a pause in the struggle the dentist said: "There's one point in our favor," and Geoffrey, with polite interest, asked, "What's that?" The reply, which he cherished, was, "A good patient," and the joke was that he wasn't really a good patient, he was only pretending to be. And now when Sewell put on his rubber gloves Geoffrey felt that he had got to bluff him, to keep up a reputation for the normal. He was humble, weak, but there was just a thread of tenacity that for practical purposes was as good as a stout rope. He maintained the character of a good patient, gaining some respect for gesture, for attitude.

Discussing his operation with the nurse he learnt to his suprise that he had done a good deal of talking or calling out before the chloroform subdued him. In such a case there may be some want of dignity in asking what was said, but he did ask, and the nurse was not very ready to tell him, though she seemed willing to have it dragged out of her. Professionally she might be justified on the plea that the patient must not be excited. To his consternation Geoffrey learnt that he had shouted that Sewell was not a gentleman; he had insisted on that in some detail, and there had been some puzzling reference to a diamond ring. Gough had laughed, but Sewell had not paid any attention till the ring was mentioned. Then he had said: "Why the deuce shouldn't a man wear a diamond ring if it pleases him?" Geoffrey groaned, and the nurse, in vexation, said, "There! I shouldn't have told you." It was horribly annoying. "Of course you never know what they'll say," she declared. She considered Mr. Sewell a perfect gentleman and Geoffrey hastened to agree. "What could I have meant?" he said, and acted incredulity. The nurse begged that he would not tell Mr. Sewell and, as it seemed impossible to explain to him, he promised. What had he meant? This arrogance of the gentlemanlike, petty exclusiveness, seemed despicable now. Sewell was a man of fine qualities, and here in all the sincerity of unconsciousness he had insulted him. And now when Sewell visited him Geoffrey was vastly uncomfortable. He tried to emphasize his gratitude, he was eagerly cordial. Sewell was cool and

kind and admirably master of himself; he wore his ring without a difference.

Geoffrey had visitors and he heard something of the progress of the war which was remote; a baleful story told to a child. It was Mary who came first, and she was gentle and anxious, finding him strangely altered. She could take it casually or philosophically that the familiar manhood in him should be so subdued. She asked him a question. "Do you see everything the same?"

He stared at her. "What do you mean?" There was a hint of protest in his tone. He dreaded the controversial.

And she said, hurriedly, "It doesn't matter. It's nothing."

They spoke of other things, and Mary gave him household news and talked of Milly's nursing projects, and even of hers. When she had gone he reviewed his impressions, and, struck with an idea, he asked the nurse for a mirror. She held one before him and he looked at his pale, sunken face, which seemed hardly of this world. That was what Mary had seen, and the poor girl must have had the thought that he might be purged of bloody, warlike imaginings; that some illumination might have come with this subdual of the flesh. She would not worry him; it was a poor, attenuated hope, hurriedly concealed. He found it very pathetic, and yet he thought that had she been there he might have been roused to angry protest.

Men from the office came—Burke, and Attar, and Tate, and one afternoon he was considerably aston-

ished and a little embarrassed when Bonsor was announced. Bonsor was at the door, and only a firm decision could have excluded him; besides, it was a dull afternoon, and Bonsor might be amusing.

Bonsor, it seemed, had thought it "only right" to tell him that he admired this attempt to enlist. He was beyond the age himself or he would certainly have applied for a commission. "I am glad," he continued, "that your eyes are opened at last." "To what?" said Geoffrey rather tartly, and Bonsor, with marked tact, said that they wouldn't go into that now. Geoffrey laughed and asked what Riley was doing. Riley was of an age for soldiering, but it appeared that he was conscious of a talent—possibly even a genius—for organizing, and so he wanted to organize something. And, indeed, this war seemed likely to develop an orgy of organization. Thousands have discovered that mere blind, blunt work leads nowhither, but that properly directed, labor can do wonders. The difficulty is that the natural aspiration to direct has caused a rush for the higher posts. Bonsor would have liked to put himself at the head of something, but that his own business—children's underclothing—claimed all his energies. He took an exalted view of the underclothing trade, and, later, when the stress came and there was so much talk about the necessity of providing milk for the children —Bonsor never denied their right to milk—he was bitter about the deplorable condition of their underclothing and the infamous attempts of parents to save on this item.

Bonsor had a tremendous fund of gossip, and such phrases as "know for a fact" and "a man high up at the Admiralty told me" besprinkled his communication of it. Geoffrey's skepticism was, perhaps, excessive, but Bonsor fed it with the crudest of spy stories. He believed implicitly in the German governesses with bombs at the bottom of their boxes, in the signals flashing from boarding-houses at Southport or Blackpool; presently he would believe in the heroic Germans who, by means of lanterns from the top story, gave the direction to Zeppelins for their own destruction. He was excited about our neglect to intern harmless old bores of German origin, whom he credited with miracles of organized hypocrisy, and he whispered of damning facts that they had let out at dinner parties; the facts were in *Whitaker's Almanac,* but it appeared that a guileless German government was ready to pay huge sums for them. Geoffrey found that the easiest way to deal with all this was to accept it with ironic calm; it was a pretty good joke and, when you could take it that way, the further Bonsor went the jollier it was. Certainly there was some danger in this attitude of mind as there must be in all extremes. You do not put a genial skeptic at the head of your Criminal Investigation Department.

Bonsor was good, too, on the strategy of the war and the plan to draw the Germans into the center of France, there to annihilate them. The whole thing was terrible, or it was solemn, but if the humorist keeps his nerve he may find his best opportunities

in the Day of Judgment or the Day of Wrath. If Bonsor had lived at the beginning of the nineteenth century he would have believed firmly enough that an Englishman was equal to three Frenchmen. There was a sort of loyalty about him; he was a fool, but a faithful fool. He went about gathering superficial expressions of opinion and then he produced them with emphatic conviction as his own. His individuality consisted of a few accidental features which recalled character in others. He had some dim consciousness of his insignificance and it pushed him to emphasis, he developed a manner. When you got him alone he lost some of this truculence, but his obstinacy prevailed. It was all he had. It was faith, loyalty, religion, and morals.

Geoffrey listened to Bonsor's babble, and wondered that he should ever have been angry with him. The virulent Riley was another matter, and Riley, it seemed, was disposed to skulk; in the interests of symmetry you may be grateful to a bully if he fits into the scheme of things as a coward. But your rat may put up a great fight when it is cornered. This war was to bring a tremendous change in values; all manner of gallantries and meannesses were to sprout in unexpected places; the high were to be brought low and the humble exalted. Men who might have led quiet, noble lives were to fail miserably through some hidden flaw, and loathsome blackguards to die as heroes. It seemed that this was, at last, the chance for the individual, and it seemed, too, that everything was to be poured into a common stock.

With surprise and indignation Geoffrey heard Bonsor refer to Sewell as "a bit of a bounder—good surgeon, of course." Bonsor, certainly, had not fine perceptions, but he had caught something of the current estimates; and club standards may be unerring in their limited way. Geoffrey spoke angrily in defense of Sewell, and the more angrily that he, too, was tainted by that cruelty of exclusiveness which exalts some trivial refinement, some trick of suave deprecation above the realities of manhood. It crossed his mind that he would some day write a novel with the bounder for hero; yes, the bounder should be a Galahad, a Christ. Well, manhood was coming to its own, and he, too, would presently be put to the test; he would have to find his level. In his heart he protested. He had built up an edifice of life slowly, with infinite pains and, in a dim, frustrate way, with such righteousness as was in him. Now it was to be shattered; at least it was to be tested as he could not have foreseen. And what followed might alter everything; calamities of the spirit are retrospective. He thought of himself and Mary—he thought of her before Sibyl—and it seemed that even Mary, with all her repudiations of this state of war, might find him out. They were the imaginings of a sick man, of a timid spirit. He had silenced Bonsor, who was fumbling among the books on the table by the bed and obstinately prolonging his visit. He handled a volume of *The Dynasts* with a sort of incredulity, and Geoffrey waited impatiently for his futile comment. It was delayed, and from his bed

Geoffrey surveyed the world. He felt himself removed from it all; he was the Ironies, the Pities, the sinister or benevolent spirits that brooded over Hardy's battlefields. And then he found himself agreeing politely with Bonsor's platitudes about the comparative insignificance of these old wars. They had only thousands to kill where we have millions, they played with obsolete toys like muskets and cannon-balls. Bonsor kindled at inflations; as the millions mounted his emotions would take the cast of awe. He had not the intelligence to explore the interests of modern warfare with its fresh and complex problems, its disconcerting possibilities, but he responded to quantity. There are many of us, we are great, we are progressive. We are British, and at the back as well as the front of Bonsor's mind was the obstinate belief in success which makes for success.

Geoffrey believed sometimes that he could analyze Bonsor's conversation into components representing the more forcible of his consorts. "A new world is coming," says Bonsor, "and there will be no room in it for *laissez-faire;* activity, not passivity, will win the day." Economists, it seemed, would have to give way to hearty business men who would stand no nonsense; your puking philanthropists to men of iron (acting, no doubt, from the highest motives). With an eye on the bedside books, Bonsor declared that literature and the arts were on the verge of a profound change. He was a little vague about its character and direction. "I've heard something of this sort before," said Geoffrey, and then, with a smile, "I

can see Wordsworth and Shelley shining like stars in the sky." It was not addressed to Bonsor, it was a parenthesis of his own, but Bonsor replied to it. Wordsworth and Shelley were not the point, it seemed, but the decadent, unmoral, or immoral modern literature. "Don't you think some of it very beautiful?" said Geoffrey languidly, but beauty, too, was not the point. "We've got to be braced up," said Bonsor, and he mentioned a volume of Australian poems which had the very spirit of conquering Rome. Geoffrey was too polite to ask him who had said that.

It was an easy transition to the theater, and Bonsor remarked with approval that the character of the pieces at the Playgoers' had already undergone a change. "No more *Alice Deans?*" said Geoffrey pleasantly, and Bonsor "confessed" that he thought that sort of thing was on the shelf. "Of course, classics are classics," he said indulgently, "but we've not had many during the last fifty years."

"Diplomacy and two or three more," suggested Geoffrey mischievously, and Bonsor assented to this gravely. It was difficult to think of him as a man to be hurt.

He mentioned that Miss Drew was coming to the Playgoers' in a few weeks. "But of course you'll know all about that," he said. His tone had no particular significance.

CHAPTER XVI

COTERIE

DESCENDING from the tram in Cross Street, Geoffrey was conscious of his stick and his limp, and did his best not to look like a hero prematurely wounded. He had intended to have tea at home, but a wrangle with Mary had perturbed him, and so he had pretended or fancied that he had work to do at the office. Mary and he had blundered upon the subject of German excesses and her skepticism had annoyed him. He had been skeptical about it himself, but the miserable conviction was growing that German soldiers were not quite as other civilized men, and his sensitiveness on the subject demanded that she should agree with him precisely. She had been warm and emphatic on the meanness of believing ill of our enemies, and had gone further than she intended; he had been angry and had said hard things stupidly. Now it made him unhappy to think of her unhappy at home, and all the time he had been in the tram he had been up against the impossibility of going back to have tea with her. For he couldn't do that. He wanted to do it and he couldn't. If they had quarreled savagely and tragically he might have done it, but now there was not the necessary rebound. He

had the grace to hope that Milly Warde would come in and make a distraction for her. And he wanted a distraction himself.

And so he limped into the tea-shop, and downstairs there he found the little coterie of intellectuals, who hailed him almost cordially. They were too well-mannered to embarrass him with demand for more explanations than he wished to give, and they went on with their talk without making him feel that it was exclusive. It seemed to be on the endless subject of Philistinism, for, like most ardent young men, these lived very much on their antipathies. Their ardors, too, were overlaid with languors and ironies; they did not parade their enthusiasms, but it meant something when they markedly abstained from contempt. Imalian could hardly be called a leader among them, but his melancholy courtesy had influenced their manners. These were charming, at least when you were there; for Geoffrey was conscious of the critical attitude and of a certain avidity in fastening on a fresh object for criticism. These men knew one another pretty well and they had exhausted one another's obvious possibilities. They had, as Imalian would say, perfected the formulas, and there was a certain reluctance to having them disturbed. The stranger or the comparative stranger might think that he was getting on finely with them, but if, after his departure, he could have played the eavesdropper it might have astonished him considerably. They were young, they had their secret enthusiasms, and even some spectacular ones, and they specialized in contempt. The

talent acclaimed yesterday was thrust aside to-day as a mere masquerade, an aping of genius. They sought the highest; in their queer way they followed the quest of the Holy Grail. They were good fellows who would help one another.

It was a capital distraction and the talk flitted from one thing to another. They prided themselves on not being unduly obsessed by the war, though, being human, they returned to it. Its effect on the big, florid world of financial successes and social greed was discussed, and Bevan maintained, reasonably enough, that these represented constant elements in human nature and could never be eliminated by patriotic ideals which were what he called a side-show. "Eliminated? No," said Geoffrey, "but they may be vastly reduced." Bevan questioned this, and Geoffrey suggested that thousands of men were now volunteering for hardship and possible death who had always sought the gross comforts.

"Simply the pressure of public opinion," said Bevan. "That's the strongest thing in life."

"You mean that patriotic ideals are universal already?" said Geoffrey.

"We're all virtuous in the abstract. A set of scoundrels will cheer a fine sentiment."

"I think the impulse for sacrifice comes from within," said Geoffrey.

This was debated, and it was agreed that there was a spectacular element, varying in individuals. Bevan objected to this idealization of self-sacrifice. He considered it an impertinence for any one to sacrifice him-

self for him, and he had no desire to do it for another. "But what the deuce are you to do when the Germans come?" said Geoffrey. The general sense seemed to be that the Government and stupid diplomacy were to blame. Some one said that if we had to fight, a sort of militia ballot seemed the fair thing, and to this it was objected that all those who wanted to fight should go first. There was evidently no enthusiasm here for the military career; the whole thing was so "damned idiotic" and unworthy of civilized men. Bevan said that it was unreasonable to ask a man to die before his time unless you could promise him another life and the odds seemed to be against that. After considering the subject and weighing the odds he had come to the conclusion that they were a shade worse than five to two against immortality. Imalian smiled indulgently, and you could believe that he had some secret, deep intelligence on the subject.

A quiet, pale young man whose name Geoffrey didn't know said that a ballot would be coercion just as much as anything else. "I'll go to the war or not as I like," he said, "and it happens that I don't like." He declined to be mixed up in "your quarrels." It seemed that he had a high ideal of personal freedom. Niceties about taking life didn't trouble him. "In certain circumstances I should not object to kill a man," he said, "but it must be the man I want to kill and not an innocent, irrelevant peasant a mile off." He had no objection to Christian non-resistance and none to war for those who liked it. "If you are naturally cruel and bloody," he said, "it's a splendid

opportunity to exercise your gifts under respectable auspices."

Geoffrey, rather wearily, advanced some argumentative formulas about the impossibility of isolating the individual in the State. "We may come to this," he said, "that food can only be brought here by fighting. Would you expect us to go on feeding you?"

The pale young man said that his money would be as good as anybody else's.

"When you're adrift on a raft," said Geoffrey, "money loses its value. All who conform to the general interest share alike; the others are pushed over the edge."

"Simple analogies for complex states!" He agreed that a point might come at which the dissenter must choose between acquiescence and martyrdom. "I should probably choose acquiescence," he said, "but with a personal reserve."

"Of what nature?" asked Geoffrey.

"Well, it would have to be ironical, I suppose."

"As much of that as you like," said Geoffrey. "Thought is free."

"You make a curious, arbitrary distinction between thought and action," said the other.

Then they had a rather ugly little discussion about the relation of war to sex indulgence. "It's natural," said Bevan, "that they should go together." A man who may soon be killed hurries up with sensual pleasures. Already young soldiers are marrying in haste and they seem to think their lusts are holy if the Church blesses them."

Geoffrey said: "If life is going to be speeded up it won't be all the wrong way. We shall hurry up with our idealisms and nobilities too. And why should lovers be thwarted if—if they can get ahead of death?"

He withdrew into a meditation; he had got back to himself. And then it appeared that his friends were safely back at literature again—they always returned to that—and the pale young man was analyzing the terms of his skepticism. It seemed that he mistrusted the classics profoundly. It was not difficult to distinguish good from bad in contemporary literature, but how were you to compare the merits of Fielding and Frank Swinnerton? Why is Charlotte Brontë better than Viola Meynell? He was scornful about the "academic reverberations" on the side of the elder writers. He admitted a "personal deficiency" in criteria, but suggested that criteria were little more than the petrifaction of obsolete opinion.

Imalian said that you didn't want formulas to see that Keats was ahead of the "Georgians."

"Ah," said Bevan, "their fault is that they're alive." And then he quoted something about "the dead for the dead." The world is full of dead people who care only for dead authors.

Anyhow, they were far from the war now, and it is one of the mitigations of the human lot that round a table with your friends you can choose your life; you can live exclusively. Geoffrey looked about him and saw the various parties intent on their own affairs and moving freely in them. Through the ages liberty

has survived in intimate conversation with a friend. At his table somebody was saying, "Jane Austen is perfect but not first rate; Conrad is first rate but not perfect." But he was conscious of two men who were sitting near him and discussing something with a subdued enthusiasm. "Breaking both ways," he heard, and "four men on the leg side." They were talking about cricket, about the season dead and gone and perhaps never to return. They had set up their little protection against a terrible, insensate world, and talked quietly and happily about old cricket matches. This underground tea-room became a sort of oubliette.

And then, something to his vexation, Geoffrey found himself back at the Germans and rather tartly combating the easy, superior contention that we are all pretty much alike, that in cruelties and treacheries it is six of one and half a dozen of the other, that you cannot frame an indictment or eulogy about a nation, that indignation is an anachronism. "How can we trust them? How can we make peace with them?" he said, and he was guilty of something grandiloquent about the sword between. He was uneasily conscious that he spoke very much as Bonsor might have spoken, and that had he been with Bonsor he would have said such things as these men were saying. It is hard to keep a middle way, and he found himself swayed by his antagonisms. He would be just, but justice is not in the middle way.

They all went upstairs together, and they tried, through the perturbations and rufflings, to catch the friendly note again. Geoffrey felt that he had blun-

dered rather heavily among them. He had taken them at their word, and, with all its cleverness, they were better than that. They might go by wrong ways, but not by base ones; some of them were yet to turn out no better than common heroes. It seemed to him that in finding the greatest common measure of its individuals the world has an awkward job before it.

As he paid his bill he glanced round this upper room where ladies congregate, and there sat Sibyl in her old place looking at him eagerly. He nodded to Imalian, who smiled benevolently and followed the others out. Geoffrey sat down opposite to Sibyl at the table.

"At last!" he said.

PART III

CHAPTER XVII

AT LAST

"At last?" she repeated.

He smiled at her encouragingly and it seemed to him that there was no need for hasty explanations or even for explicit ones. He had her there and he was powerful and aggressive and tender; he was the successful lover possessed by a serene confidence. He didn't answer her "At last?" They talked a little about immediate things, mentioned the Wibberleys, recalled—but faintly—Grasmere. Sibyl asked about Mary, and in his sensitive appreciation it seemed that this was wistfully. She had blue, beseeching eyes. She was an exquisite creature. On the stage she could be decorative, grandiose. A fine actress, of course, but now those mimic presentments, disguises, posturings, faded away in this reality. He had seen her face daubed with paint, and on that gaudy night of *Alice Dean* it had been strangely alluring. Now her lineaments were finer, nobler. That stage life was a romantic background; that boasted art of hers was charming and a bit of a joke. He would try to explain this to her some day when he understood it more clearly himself. She was looking at him timidly, inquiringly; she was not happy and he must come to the

point. Surely it was understood between them now, but maiden modesty demands the explicit.

He said: "I've often thought of writing to you."

"But you didn't."

"I wonder if I could make you understand why."

It was with the ghost of archness that she said: "You can't get over my stupidity."

"It isn't that," he said almost seriously. "I felt it would be such a tremendous thing to do."

"I'm so important?"

"You say light things sadly," he said.

"Well, I suppose I'm light and sad."

"Why are you sad?"

"Why didn't you write to me? I mean why should you write to me?"

"I don't do things properly," he said. "I don't do them at the right time. I think I wait for things to seize me."

"I'm one of the things that might seize you?"

"You have," he said.

She looked away and so did he. They were considering their environment. It was not an ideal one for confidences, but the tea-room was half empty, they were not conspicuous, and the people near them looked neutral. It is a fascinating game to make love under espionage, but a game was hardly what they wanted. The time for explanations, for assurances, for the plain word had come.

Yet it seemed that she would not have it so. She asked for news politely. She inquired about his operation though she already knew most of what he told

her. Then he questioned her about her movements and the prospects of the company in war time, and her recent parts. They were getting cold, as the children say in their seeking game, but Geoffrey was in no hurry even now.

"You actors are birds of passage," he said; "you are curiously isolated, detached. How little I know of you! I don't even know whether Sibyl Drew is your real name. Is it?"

She shook her head.

"And it means so much to me. I can't unlearn it. Not yet. You'll always be Sibyl anyway. I can't think of you with family attachments. You drop out of the sky, you rise out of the sea foam. To me you are the most romantic thing in the world."

He felt himself shaken, breathless. This would scarcely do. His ardor must be contained. He looked about him uneasily and was reassured. The neutrals were still neutral.

"You shall know something more of me," she said.

"In good time. You can be taken on trust. I'm interested, of course—not exactly curious. It's you that matters, not your belongings, though I'm sure they're charming. Whatever they were they couldn't kill the romance in you. Ah! You do everything beautifully. Did I ever tell you how much I admire your diction—the way you talk? The stage for that. Give it its due. Yes, you've a precision of speech such as you get from a foreigner who speaks our language perfectly."

"I can explain that."

"You shall. You shall explain everything. As much as you like. But I'm egotistical. I want to go on babbling to you. Why do I delay? Why have I delayed? You know what I want to tell you?"

"That you are going to be a soldier?"

"I didn't mean that, though that's part of it. Dare I whisper it across the table? Observe that to any one who looks at me I'm talking politely, casually, to you. Watch me appear to be rather bored. I'm trembling with excitement. With a look you can put me in deadly fear, with a word—oh, but don't speak that word!"

She leaned back in her chair keeping her eyes fixed on him.

"A soldier?" he said. "I'm as good as one. I shall be one directly. And do you know what every soldier wants? I'm like the rest. He wants the best thing in the world. He wants"—he leaned forward and breathed the word gently—"a sweetheart."

She looked at him steadily and, with a little alarm, he perceived that there was no flattering concession. Her eyes were stony. For an impatient moment he thought that she might be oppressed by the timidity of convention, and he glanced hurriedly round the room. They were sufficiently isolated. He came back to her and she was still looking at him. "Ah!" he said, "you frighten me. Your eyes are gray now, and I thought they were blue. Have I been stupid and

presumptuous? Forgive me. Be kind to me. You can't be cruel."

"It is a cruel world now, my friend."

"And a merciful one, full of sympathy and devotion —yes, and love."

"You love all? All your fellow-creatures, even your enemies?"

"One must hate cruelty and oppression. And you can't separate the deed from the man."

"You hate the Germans?"

"I suppose I hate them. Yes. It's a matter of moods. I'm in the ruck. I'm not blatant. There's no real lapse in charity, I hope. Righteous anger, indignation, have their place in the world. Of course, one can make allowances, exceptions."

"Exceptions?" she cried. "And how if I will not be an exception?"

"If you——"

"You do not see?—you do not understand? I am a German."

He stared at her and his face became rigid in an attempt at a smile. His mind worked with extraordinary rapidity under the apprehension that he might lose her. It was a tremendous, bewildering blow, and yet the practical man in him rallied instinctively to the lover. Thoughts crowded on him and he put them aside. He must hold to what was precious, he must not offend her; and as she looked at him with brave, terrified eyes his pity was overwhelming, it obliterated cautions and reservations. He became calm, he was conscious of calamity, but that was something from

outside. He saw her beautiful and adorable, he was strong and tender. He leaned to her and murmured, "My dearest love."

As she looked at him her eyes filled with tears, and her face puckered a little. But she only wavered, she kept her eyes fixed on him. It might have been that she awaited with meekness the sentence of an inexorable judge; or that he was on his trial before her. He threw himself back in his chair and looked at her smilingly, reassuringly. And now he was thinking that he must, after all, be wise. What was best? What was possible? He mistrusted his impulses, he wanted to get away and think. There is in every man a calculating brute, and he was not wholly free from a selfish caution; at a crisis of physical danger the man has still a self crying for help even when he sacrifices himself to the woman in his charge. Discouragements and dismay surged upon him and, for the moment, clouded his vision of her. He permitted reaction to go to fantastic lengths. Suppose that he got up and bowed and walked out! Was this the course for a prudent and truly patriotic Briton? Or for a lineal descendant of Judas Iscariot? And yet if he did it at all it must be now. Their choice must be made now and his choice was to help her.

But how? Could they do it? Or what could they do? They had not explored the situation, and, though the big fact seemed enough for the moment and was unquestioned, there might be mitigations and qualifications. They watched one another, they were on their guard, and presently he would be startled to rea-

lize that her thoughts had been something like his; the male, the Briton, is accustomed to the lead; the lover has the attitude of power. She watched him anxiously while his face changed—he did not mean it to change—and she said: "You are thinking what to do." And then she added: "That's right."

"I'm thinking about you," he said.

"I'm not the only person concerned," she said, and it was with a touch of protest, of impatience, petulance. She looked about her, she became more definitely conscious of the environment and so did he. The room was almost empty and the waitress came to ask for further orders and to write out a check. Sibyl was gracious with the girl, and he was conscious that she bore herself beautifully in small things as in great. She was an actress and he recollected his old contention that acting should be life—or was it that life should be acting?—that there should be a subdued consciousness in the most beautiful manners, in the perfect exposition of a noble mind. She was an actress, and now it seemed that this advent of the waitress had closed the first act of their drama. The next must be taken up, as second acts are, with a certain resolution.

She said: "I must go."

He was honestly ardent. She was touching, she was lovely, and he was immensely moved. He poured out good lover's talk, and it seemed that she blinked and purred under it; she let him go on. At last she said: "You ought to have gone away and thought before you said all that." There was a hint of raillery in it,

a little efflorescence of happiness. "I'm glad. Oh! I'm glad," she said, "but I don't deserve it. I am much to blame."

"How?"

"All these weeks and months I never told you. I have been unhappy. But how could I tell you? I meant to. I might have written. But it would have seemed that I thought—that I expected—that you—and at Grasmere I wondered if you knew. I'm very close. I could explain that partly. Perhaps it will not be necessary. If I begin there is so much to explain."

"Explain, then. Tell me. I want to know everything about you. Nothing can harm you."

"I wonder if I should."

"At Grasmere—you knew that I loved you?"

"These things must be said. You have to be very sure."

"You know it now."

"But I am a German girl."

"I hear you say so. You are English enough for me."

"You would have me English?"

"You are. You shall be."

"I will not."

"Well, I wouldn't have you renounce your country lightly."

"Would you have me renounce it?"

He knitted his brows and regarded her whimsically, pretending to an ease which he did not feel: "I suppose that might be most convenient."

She said, with a lightness that was assumed too, "It's a tragical position, isn't it? You might write a play about it all. And I should have to be the villain with a bomb at the bottom of my box."

Their little jocularities served to take the edge off things, but they looked at one another anxiously and warily; each feared to inflict a wound and each feared to yield a point. He said: "The word is with you. You know all about me and you've lots of things to tell me about yourself. Be assured of my sympathy."

He spoke graciously and almost formally. Their emotions seemed to have chilled a little, and they were conscious of something deep in opposition; at least of something to be explored. Yet she said: "Is it any use going into it all? You are generous, but I think you are not generous enough for that. Ought I not to say so? What's the use of pretending? You're thinking now: 'I've committed myself. How can I be kind to her and get away?'"

"It is not so," he said gently, and yet he was conscious that she had penetrated to an element in his thoughts.

"We must be honest now," she said. "We must both be honest."

"You begin."

"I'll begin with this," she said. "You made me happy. I've known happiness. Just now, I mean. When you spoke—when you said—I forgot everything else then. I shall never forget that."

He said: "I should never be happy again if I lost you."

"I like you to say that. I hope it won't be true."

"You mean that I shan't lose you?"

"That was not what I meant."

"To lose you! I'm trying to be honest, you see. I try to face the idea. And I can't."

"It wasn't right to spring it on you like this."

"It was a tremendous surprise. I've been stupid. There was always something strange about you. Deliciously strange. German? Why! You're as English as can be. What do you mean by German?"

"German father, German mother. Born in Germany."

"I love you."

"Your impulses are beautiful and yet you're thinking all the time."

"I love you."

"I shall always have that."

"German indeed!"

"It's not my fault, is it?"

"Welcome to England!"

"That can't be."

"As my wife——"

"I fear that will never be, my friend."

"I ask you to marry me. I beg for that great honor and happiness."

"You are generous—from your own point of view."

"How?"

"I am German."

"You reiterate it. As my wife you would be an Englishwoman. Many Germans are on our side. You saw that manifesto in the papers the other day? It

was from German-born people who sympathized with us."

"I am sorry for them."

"Right and wrong come before nationality."

"Right and wrong are very difficult for me, but I know that I'm a German."

"You are on their side? You want them to win?"

"I want peace."

"There is no peace."

"I want a quiet place in the country and cattle feeding, trees and clouds and little brooks."

"That is what the Germans are destroying."

"And not they alone. They are a very great nation. Their enemies close in upon them. Our enemies."

"Would you go back to Germany?"

"Then I should hate them for making war on you. It is misery for me every way. There is no place in the world for me."

He said: "Your place is with me."

"And rather than lose me you would have me a little baser than I am?"

"You cannot be base."

"Every day, everywhere," she said, "I see and hear these appeals to patriotism. They're placarded on the walls and shouted in the streets. You are to crush Germany. I am a German woman. I am close and silent for I am no fool. I only speak of it to you and that because I must. And it would be very convenient to cover up my tracks and marry you. I might do it. My mother's dead now. They're all

dead that matter. I was a little girl when we left Germany. It's a memory that has gone fainter. You would have me wipe it out and become a proper Englishwoman? Why not?"

He waited for her to continue, and she said: "I am not that kind."

"My dear," he said, "I hate to stress the point but those people are not like you. I think it was monstrous of them to begin the war, but let's agree that there's room for dispute over that—these politics are puzzling. Yes, but they're stained with crimes, they've been shockingly barbarous. I'm afraid there's no doubt about that."

"Is it in our blood?" she said. "Do you think that? You are thinking: Is there, deep down in her, something different from me, something savage and wicked? Stop;" she said, checking his protest. "How can you help thinking that? I've asked myself that question. I've been frightened by all the talk and noise. And if we married and had a child——" she bowed her head.

Geoffrey said: "What happiness, my dear!"

"I must hurt you," she said, "and myself. You would hear that child crying some time and you would think: She had a German mother—I think of it as a girl—she has a German mother and the Germans are cruel."

"No, no," he cried. "You must not say such things. It's shocking."

"You see, I have shocking ideas," she said, and she might have been speaking triumphantly.

"You don't think it; you don't believe it," he said.

"I think many things. I think them over and over. I think till I can think no more. No, I do not believe it. The Germans I knew were kind and good. They can't have altered like that. I don't know what's true and what isn't. Perhaps nations get too soft sometimes. Perhaps you can be very great and very noble and a little too cruel. Perhaps I'm not worthy to be a German. If you English were beaten and humbled I think I could become an Englishwoman."

Geoffrey said: "That will never be."

"The simplest thing," she said, "would be for us to quarrel and be done."

"It would never be done."

"A sad, kind friendship?" she said.

"That's no good."

They paused and again they were conscious of the teashop and of their waitress eyeing them curiously, not without sympathy. She had often seen lovers dissembling at these tables, though commonly they did it more plausibly than these. She was not very attractive nor very young and so must take her romance in small instalments at second-hand.

Sibyl began to draw on a glove and then took it off again. She hesitated, glancing about her as if for assistance, and then she said: "There's something else I must tell you."

He said: "You've told me very little."

She began a pathetically dogged narrative. He learnt that her real name was Elisabeth Wiedemann, that her father had been "some sort of merchant"

in Hamburg. He was little more now than a dim, kindly memory, for he had died when she was seven or eight. "Yes, he was kind," she said; "he was gentle and affectionate, I know. He did not want to harm people, I think. You will not believe that."

"My dear girl!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "Of course I will."

"Stay a little," she said, and then, to his surprise, she began to laugh. It was a mirthless laugh, the ghost, the skeleton of a laugh; it wasn't like a laugh at all. He waited in some consternation and she said: "I'm getting silly. I find this very hard."

"Another time," he suggested.

"It's got to be done." And then in a matter-of-fact way that was very well assumed she told him that after her father had died she and her mother had come to London. As she paused and looked at him it seemed incumbent on him to say "Why?"

"You shall hear."

She paused again and he asked if she had any brothers and sisters. She shook her head and then she said. "That makes it seem less complicated, doesn't it?"

"Uncles, aunts?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"Friends?"

"Not many friends."

"Well?" he said.

"I told you that Wiedemann was my real name. When we came to England we changed it to Hoffmann."

"Why?"

"And then I became Sibyl Drew. I'm full of aliases. I'm a suspicious character. Do you wonder that I laughed? The joke is against you. I wish I didn't like you and then I could laugh properly. You behave angelically, but it's too bad. Three different names!"

"A fourth and then you'll stop."

"How hopeless it is! No woman could be good enough to make it worth your while. I'm not."

"Let me judge of that."

"It gets worse. Hear me out, but don't say anything kind."

"Go on."

"My mother was very musical. She was an amateur but a real one. We had no money—very little. She taught music in London—I hardly know how she got started—some German introductions, I think. And she taught me—music and other things. Then I went to school. What does it matter? I cannot talk about my mother. I should cry. I've been to a boarding-school. Quite a good one, and I don't know how she afforded it. I'm educated in a way."

She gazed at him with a queer little assumption of dignity, and he nodded, wondering whether there was anything he could do or say that she would like. She went on: "My mother had to take to playing dance music—dancing classes. I had left school and I helped her. We met theatrical people. They are not so bad as you think. They gave us tickets. I once saw Irving when I was a little girl. It was just a chance—music,

dancing, acting. I had to take what I could get. What does it matter? I drifted here."

"Your mother?"

"She died about two years ago."

"You're all alone."

"I've lots of friends, of course. I mean I'm friendly with lots of people. That is—I have been."

"You've no tie with Germany?"

"You don't need a tie with your country."

"Why did you leave it?"

"And why did we change our name? You want to know that?"

"Tell me what you like. Only what you like."

"I must tell you all. All that matters."

"Very well, my dear child."

"Why do you call me that?"

"You are like a child confessing something—a proud child."

"Am I proud? Of what? I'm going to crawl in the dust. My father was a criminal. We left Hamburg and we changed our name. It had become shameful. Yes, the name stank."

"But you were only a child."

"If I am bad you mustn't judge Germans by me."

"I shall not judge you by them."

"It was a notorious affair. People were ruined. It seems we had to go. I didn't understand, but my mother told me something afterwards—a little. I became very curious, but I couldn't question her. My father was a ghost between us. She made a pious memory of him and I wanted to understand. How

could she explain, poor woman? She was very good, very brave, but she couldn't do that. I wanted to know everything. I resented it—that I shouldn't know. He was my father. I might have been kinder to her. We were never estranged—oh, no!—but she always had a little dim fear that I would make her tell me more. If I had liked I might have given her the assurance she wanted. She didn't want things said right out; that would have been too much. I had that little bit of cruelty in my nature—that I wouldn't give her peace. Is that because I am German? Are we cruel? But he was my father."

Geoffrey said: "Was it in his lifetime that he—that they——"

"I suppose that things became difficult. It was all found out after his death—after his suicide."

She spoke in an even voice and she did not meet his eyes now; she seemed to be looking over his shoulder. He wanted her to look at him for he had no words for such an occasion. His face was eloquent, but she would not look at it. She continued: "I don't remember much about it—not accurately. I've a vision of my mother, very pale, trying to fasten my cloak and strangely bungling. I didn't want to go out, for it wasn't the time when I went out and then I tried to get her to come with me. She didn't seem to understand, and then the front door was opened and some people were there. I was snatched away and pushed into a room. I screamed in passion and fear. There was a shuffling of feet and movements outside the door. I became quiet. I was trembling, and immedi-

ately my mother came in. We sat on the floor holding to one another for a long time. All that is very vivid to me. Why do I tell you all this? We are only Germans."

"You mustn't say that."

"But I keep feeling like that. All our agony, all our crimes if you like—and you say—you think—they are only Germans. You should be sorry for us."

"The time may come for that."

"We can't speak to one another without hurting," she cried. "How then, could we—I feel that I must tell you these things about myself. And all the time there's a great gulf between us. You are kind and generous and you want me to be English—to be as English as I can—and then—you do mean that?—we are to be lovers. And I'm half English, I suppose, from living here all the time, and I've liked the English. Would you think better of me then if I said: Germany's wicked; I'll shake it off and be all English, if you'll let me? Would you like me better if I were cowardly and base? Perhaps Germany's all wrong. These things are too difficult for me. I know there are kind and noble people there. It's a great nation. I think it's the greatest on the earth."

"Won't you tell me more of yourself?" he said.

"Why should I bother you with my family affairs?"

"They're mine too."

"No."

"You talk of baseness. Do you expect me to say: This girl's German. I'll have none of her."

"No, you'd be punctilious but I won't let you."

"Punctilious! I'm base at heart, then?"

"It's very difficult, my friend."

"Tell me more."

"You want to know about my father?"

"If you like."

"I felt it wasn't fair to him that I shouldn't know. It was terrible that he should have died like that. As I grew older I pitied him very much and yet I didn't know how to pity because I knew so little. His portrait was in my mother's room, and I found another queer old faded thing that I framed and hung up in mine. Are the criminals so much worse than the others? Christ pitied and loved them. I know I'm not like Christ. I'm secret and bitter. I've never talked to any one like this before. I don't know what things I'm going to say. I don't know whether this will be a relief to me or whether, presently, I shall be vexed and ashamed. You listen to me kindly and pitifully but—pity! pity! I want something different from that. We Germans are not pitiful, are we? Then we won't ask for pity."

"You pitied your father."

"I wanted to understand. It was not till after my mother's death that—there were letters that she hadn't destroyed. It wasn't enough. I wanted to understand. He was my father."

He found her hand under the table and grasped it. She extricated it gently. She continued: "I had a little money. A few pounds. I went to Hamburg and saw some of the people we had known. It was so

long ago and they were muddled and couldn't remember very well. Or they were kind and told me lies and didn't want me to bother. I saw lawyers—his lawyer. He was an old man and didn't understand what I wanted. He thought I was after money. The judge was dead. Perhaps I couldn't have got to see him, anyhow.

"Then I went to libraries to see the old newspapers, and to one or two—two—newspaper offices. They let me look at dirty old bound volumes. They were suspicious of me. I had to persist. I was a nuisance. When they knew what I wanted they were kind. I couldn't explain to every one. There was always the danger that I should become emotional.

"I made it out fairly well. There was no getting away from it. I don't think I need try to explain it all to you. He had done wrong. He was a criminal. If I could have talked with him I might have understood better. All that I learnt is only one side of it. I don't know why he did it. I came back very dejected."

Geoffrey pushed aside crockery and seized her hand above board. "But this was a wonderful thing to do," he said. "You're a noble creature. You're all courage and truth—yes, and pity. I'm overwhelmed with admiration."

She snatched her hand away and fumbled for her handkerchief. He saw the tears welling in her eyes. The waitress, glancing out at them from behind a screen, saw her mopping her eyes and was ready to take her side in this lovers' quarrel. Perhaps they had

made it up, and presently it appeared that it was so. Sibyl looked suddenly at the watch on her wrist and started up. "Oh, dear!" she said.

"What is it?" he asked commiseratingly.

"Look at the time. I have to act. I can't go home now. And I must eat."

"Come with me to the Midland," he said.

"There isn't time. And I hate it."

"Since they've cleared out the German waiters," he ventured, and they laughed, she rather distractedly. She knitted her brows, gazing at the watch, and beckoned to the waitress.

"Is it too late?" she said. "Could I have an egg"?

"I thought you were just going," the waitress said doubtfully.

"We were, but—I wouldn't be long. It would be so kind of you. I missed the time."

"Well, I dare say I might," said the woman. "I'm alone here now and I've got to lock up. You'll want another cup of tea." And then she brightened decisively and said: "We've got to help one another in these times. I'll do it."

"Yes, to help one another," said Sibyl. "Do you hate the Germans? If a German woman asked you for an egg would you poison it?"

"You can't poison eggs," said Geoffrey lightly.

"If they're scrambled?" said Sibyl, and continued: "Oh, heavens! what nonsense!"

The woman said: "You're not German, are you?"

Sibyl turned to Geoffrey: "Am I German?"

"About as German as I am," he said, "and I shall soon be fighting them, I suppose."

"I'd serve you, whether or not," said the woman. "It's not my business to judge folk. Now what'll you have?"

"A boiled egg, some bread and butter, tea," said Sibyl.

"I'll have the same," he said.

"You?"

"I'm in at this," he said. "I'm going to the theater, too."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "You are going to see me act to-night? That will be very interesting."

"If it won't distress you," he said; "if it won't make it more difficult."

"It will be more exciting," she said.

"And you've not had excitement enough?"

"I might have been very flat. I'd rather be excited."

"And will the flatness come at last?"

"I shall be alone then."

This sunk into his mind. But when, with a funny air of resolution, she called out to the waitress: "I'll have two eggs, please," he said: "Oh! You're magnificent. Is this acting? Is this part of the show?"

They had been standing and now she sat down. "I don't think I like that," she said. "There's some sort of kind intention. To stimulate me? I don't need it. We may hurt one another any minute."

"Till we have our perfect understanding."

"Nay, it's all shifting and changing."

The waitress put her head round the screen: "Will the gentleman have two?"

"Certainly," said Geoffrey; "a dozen if you like. I'll have exactly what madam has."

"Madam?" said Sibyl.

"I'll say Mrs. Arden if you like."

"Let us play at it a little longer."

"I am not playing."

"I have something on my mind," she said. "Did I deny my nation just now. 'Before the cock crows' —I mean when that woman asked me—I don't think it was for myself. I thought in a moment that it was hard for you and that you came here often. I'm very ready. I'm a cunning prevaricator."

"Why! It was I that did it," he said.

"I corrupt you," but she said it tenderly.

They settled down to their intimate little meal and the waitress ministered to them benevolently and brought toast and cakes. Geoffrey wanted to give her half-a-crown, but Sibyl thought it might offend her. "She does it for love," she said, and Geoffrey felt that the phrase was not amiss. He was fumbling with sixpences when the girl said she didn't want anything from soldiers; she had been "very pleased to oblige."

"How do you know I am a soldier?" said Geoffrey.

"I saw you limping when you came upstairs," she said, "and besides——" it was intimated that the emotion of their interview had betrayed it.

"I'm not a soldier yet," he said, "though I shall be."

"I hope you'll kill plenty of those Germans," she said severely, and Sibyl pretended not to hear. They both thanked her warmly and she was rather shy and offhand about it. Outside in the nearly empty street Sibyl took Geoffrey's arm.

"Let us go on playing," she said. "Or are you afraid of meeting somebody?"

"I'm not afraid of anything."

She said: "This is the happiest day of all my life. I shall never, never forget it."

"You shall have many happy days."

"Let us go on playing," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IDEA

He left her at the stage-door, and, having time on his hands and no anxiety about getting a seat, he took a thoughtful turn in the street. He was tremendously elated, quivering with tender sympathies, deeply conscious of trouble. His thoughts were hardly formed, but he considered what was the next thing to do. He must tell Mary, and he felt that he wanted to talk to Burke; he wanted reason unobscured by witty fancies. As to Mary he was conscious of a curiosity about the reception of his news; to tell her that Sibyl was German would be a peculiar experience. But now he was intent on a deeper interest.

It was one of those half-baked plays by amateurs in ideas that the repertory theaters have loosed on us. Watching the beginnings of it with the detachment which he could not always achieve—for the critical concentration is a restriction too—he realized that what he might seize upon eagerly as a subject to write about could be a bit of a bore when he became merely a member of the public. Here was a play which might be the starting point for disputation or discussion, but the old melodramas, with their ritual of plot and passion, were better fun. When Sibyl appeared it was another matter. The half-explored femininities of the

dramatist gave opportunities for refinement and Sibyl filled in all the gaps. She brought life to the play, she gave middling ideas in fine terms, she took the eye adorably. There she was—poor German girl—delighting a crowd of latent hostility and wistfully conscious of a lover who had his hostilities too. He was moved and he was greatly interested. He had taken his seat in the circle, for it was his superfine, half-jocular theory that the stalls are vulgar, that they pretend to an intimacy that can only be destructive. Now he wanted to be nearer to her, and he was guilty of borrowing an opera glass. Putting it to his eyes, the scene wobbled close to him and then he caught her, she burst upon him amazingly. She was familiar; through her paint she was surprisingly familiar. He tried to steady the glass, but it shook in his hands. She did familiar things; the lift of her head, tricks of speech, were carried on here from the tea-shop, it seemed. Your artist cannot be infinite in detail and cannot—indeed, must not—escape from her own personality. When you know her she must continue to be what you know, but with the surprises of her nature, too. Some kind of stilted assumption is possible, and Geoffrey had suffered more than most under the egregious character actor, but even with this the familiarities peep out. Sibyl was one of those who absorb a character and make it an expression of herself. To-night, when there was little to absorb, it seemed to him that he could detect a critical irony, an added charm, a slight, subtle message sent to him.

Watching her intently he perceived the delicate ad-

justments of her own temperament, the interpretations of her generous nature. In mere cleverness, in virtuosity, it was all surprising, and the queer, disconcerting idea came to him that these Germans are too much for us. He was a lover who could stray out of the charmed circle, and he was actually conscious of jealousy, of apprehension. Faintly, perhaps, it was between him and her; more clearly it was racial. They are ruthless, it seems, but are they more capable of the refinements too? Are we getting soft and blunted? An Englishman may ask himself these questions.

She was exquisite, she was romantic, and yet as he watched her it seemed that she was steadier of nerve than he. The spectator learns humility, though he may seek to reassure himself with blatancies of criticism. Geoffrey's ungenerous thoughts were stifled by his pride in her; it seemed that his generous ones were the danger. He wanted to see her more intimately, and it was not a difficult matter for him to get behind the scenes. Perhaps he wanted to realize that she was vulnerable. On the whole he was a lover just craving assurance.

He found her amongst others, and there were some casual recognitions and introductions. She was merry and she looked at him as if to say: See what I can do —and yet what knowledge is between us! For a moment she regarded him sadly, tenderly, and then she was off at a tangent like the accomplished actress with her trick of contrast. He, too, had to support a part, and he held his own tolerably in the affabilities,

even in the levities. And he was conscious all the time that this was a garish Sibyl, that this was a hectic, unreal life, and that they must be sober presently. Her face was bedaubed with paint as he had seen it on that night of *Alice Dean,* and even now he could reflect passingly that it was strange that the noble instrument of the actor's art must be coarsened for the art's supreme expression. It was not a time to think things out. She was an entrancing creature now, disguised, and yet emphasized. There was something wrong, for beauty magnified is not beauty, but Sibyl herself came quivering through the disguise. She was one in a gaudy world, and he felt himself rather coldly outside it. The paint had a fascinating quality and she lurked behind it. There was no evil, but she was coarsely baited. Ideals were remote and he was gaspingly conscious of the senses.

And then she drew him aside into a sufficient privacy, and eagerly, breathlessly she spoke to him; she gave him her idea. "I've been thinking," she said;—when? he wondered, but he did not interrupt her—"Oh, I've thought of something. Is it possible? Is it possible—Geoffrey? You are English. I am German. We must face that. There is—there must be—something noble in both. Grant that. Grant me that, Geoffrey. Oh, be generous! My dearest. I am German."

His general assent, his tenderness, his attempt to placate her were brushed aside impatiently. "Listen! Listen!" she cried. "Don't be stupid. I mean something. Oh, dear! There's no time. They'll want me.

Listen! It's this: We cannot agree. We must not agree. Not entirely. You shall be English. And I am partly English too. But I am German. Listen with sympathy. You shall champion your nation, I mine. We must be generous with one another and help one another. That means that you must help me. You can overcome me in argument but you must not. You must think of things that I ought to say. I could admire the English tremendously if they would not always be saying that we are base and cruel. Do you know that in Germany they say that of you? And it's true of us, you'll say? Then say it compassionately, Geoffrey. Pity me. Cannot we be chivalrous enemies and lovers too? I see it as beautiful, beautiful. Is it possible? And if not, all is over"—her voice sank—"between us."

He was moved. He was overwhelmed if he was not convinced. Somewhere in the cold fastnesses of the brain a warning sounded; he was dimly conscious of a remote, unexplored doubt. Yet her appeal was to the mind, to the imagination. It was a compelling idea, and he could kindle to it. He could even see it objectively as a great lesson to the world. She watched him eagerly while he relaxed, yielding himself to the current, and then passed through some phase of resistance, some mere formality of inspection. She perceived the check, and said: "I won't renounce. I'll be like the heathen who wouldn't be baptized. He would go to hell with his tribe."

Geoffrey said: "It's a noble idea. Yes. But we might come to think alike. Are we never to agree?"

"I cannot see it so."

"You're in love with your idea."

"And you?"

"I'm in love with you."

She faltered, she returned to misgivings. Pitiably, she became concerned again with small, present matters. She asked him how he liked "this fudge," and made a flattering reference to *Alice Dean*. Oh, she was clever! She thought ahead. These Germans with their peaceful penetration! He must confess to her that idea of her as the typical German, but not now.

She left him and he had a few words with a stout little comedian whose manners were but a trifle on the hither side of familiarity. Geoffrey was assured that "The Drew" was great in this play, and there were hints at London chances. The man was not really offensive, but this environment for his fine flower jarred a little on the sensitive lover. He went back to his seat, and as Sibyl did not appear on the stage immediately he could range his thoughts. He saw Sibyl and himself with an intimate, particular life of their own, and a good-natured tolerance for such a world as that behind the scenes. And their intimacy would not be just in terms of the current culture, though that might be involved; it would be secret and deep. Its nature? He was baffled here, for he had yet to know her, and he became conscious of something crude and artificial in his imaginings. But what of hers? From the vagueness emerged her idea—the idea of a chivalry of the mind, of an opposition which should be in terms of sympathy. But surely that must

bring ultimate reconcilement, agreement. And if this were so should they be content with their own salvation? Their intimacy seemed in danger of publicity, even of preachments.

He heard her laugh "off," and thrilled to the sound of it. She had a bravura entrance and directed it, he was sure, at him. She moved about the stage with pretty hectorings, she was just charmingly short of stridency, she took it all at a great pace, and perhaps the precious ideas of the play were slurred a little. He was conscious of her wistful, doubting heart. He took the opera glasses again and followed her. And, from time to time, it seemed that his sympathy detected the droop between one jolly outburst and another. If so, he was the only one and the house rang with her triumph.

He waited for her at the stage-door, and when she came he added his own tribute to her success. It was heartily phrased in common friendliness and they had their happy, easy moment in the swim of things. "You make me happy," she said, and, again, "It's a great night." She seemed already to look upon the night as something accomplished, a possession for the coming years. She barely referred to her idea but they were both conscious of it. Parting from him at the door of her lodgings, she said: "I wish I could send my love to Mary. I dare not. She can be generous, but she doesn't love me. Why should she?"

"Why should I?"

"I hate the women who are charming only to men," she said.

"I happen to know," said Geoffrey, "that you're a favorite in the company—with them all."

"Oh, well, of course I'm rather a good sort," she said. "That's nothing."

He chuckled at this claim, but it did occur to him that the good sort would not inevitably appeal to Mary. They stood together doubtfully for a moment, embarrassed by her reservations and the possible publicities of the street. Standing close beside her he volleyed endearments suddenly and hotly. She trembled under them and sank into his arms. He held her tenderly, he released her reluctantly. She said no word, but he had kissed her lips. She fumbled with a latchkey, she entered the house gropingly, and, it seemed, sadly. He felt the bitterness, the frustration of parting. She had not looked back at him.

He took his way homeward, regaining a certain mental jauntiness. Things weren't easy, but, after all, this was life. Such was a superficial reflection while the ecstasies seethed beneath. And to-night, of all nights, he was importuned by a poor creature of the streets. His discouragements were so gentle that they were misunderstood. She persisted, she became rather a nuisance, and the sentimental gave way to the irritable. But he could not be harsh to a woman to-night, and she went off a little bewildered with a dole of silver. "Two sister vessels—here is one," he quoted to himself. He saw his sympathies deepening, his horizons widening. To-night he had taken a great step onward, he had gained rich, intangible things.

He felt capable of extraordinary eloquence and there was not anything that he could not understand. This mental clarity was delightful, and gave him the sense of power and ease. It was not applied to anything in particular.

With a slight shock he remembered that he was going to face Mary, and he had a despicable little desire that she should not have waited up for him. Of course she was there, and she didn't make any demand for explanations though he was conscious that he had not been quite punctilious in this matter of his absence to-night. Perhaps it was hardly fair to Mary that he should take the attitude of "getting it over," but he plunged into the subject, standing before her. He said, "Mary, I've something to tell you," and it seemed to him that she stiffened. He felt discouragement, even annoyance, and he did not reflect that the poor girl might be trying to rally herself on their side. He paused and she waited, and then he announced the fact. "I am engaged to—to Sibyl," he said, and he was conscious that the use of her Christian name alone was an appeal. In a stifled voice Mary said, "Yes, Geoffrey," and he didn't know that she was struggling with herself, angry that she couldn't control her emotion into any genial form. Hardening a little, he continued, "I learnt—she told me a strange thing about herself. I had no idea of it. She is a German."

"A German?" said Mary in frank surprise.

"Both father and mother. They are dead. She is entirely alone."

"You knew nothing about her? Yet you were intimate?"

"These actors seem unattached. You don't think of them in connection with parents and a home. And she has neither."

"Poor child," said Mary. She said it calmly, and it seemed to Geoffrey that she was accepting a burden with a sigh.

"She says you can be generous," he continued, "and yet she dared not send you her love."

He spoke in an even, downright tone, conveying the facts. He would not press for pathos. He waited for her to speak while she sat there thinking. At last: "It is great news," she said; "it is very important. I can't say the right thing. I'll try to—I'll try to—to love her. She's very beautiful. You have good taste. I know it's awfully stupid to say that. I'm not prepared. No. I'm not generous. I can see more than I feel. We must be very, very kind to her."

"We?" he said.

"I mean that. I mean you too."

"You think I'm likely to be unkind?"

"Think how easily she may be hurt."

"Well, I suppose I've been unkind to you."

"I never said that. I didn't mean that."

"But it's true?"

"Kindness is not everything. It's no use being kind perpetually. You've been good."

"I don't know, Mary. There are times when I'm miserable about you. If you died or went away I should be smitten with remorse."

"Well," she said. "You're going away now. Remorse is stupid." And then she said: "I'm going to be awfully nice to her."

He thanked her humbly enough, and they parted coolly, wistfully. And Mary lay awake for hours wishing that things were different, sounding herself for basenesses, disentangling the intricate threads of remorse and reproach. She was puzzled with herself, for Geoffrey's news had seemed to bring her a great and terrible advantage. So, she had felt it first, and she could not reconcile this with any decent conception of herself. The girl was German and all the cruel and cowardly people would persecute her. She wondered whether the poor German girl was sleeping now.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVERS AND FRIENDS

MARY consented almost eagerly to the proposal that Sibyl and Burke should be bidden to Sunday night supper, and then, curiosity prevailing over the simple desire to be amiable, she said: "Mr. Burke certainly. Why Mr. Burke?"

"I think a lot of Burke," said Geoffrey. "He stands for sanity and friendliness."

"And you think a lot of Sibyl," she said, "and things that are equal to the same thing are equal to one another. Is this something deep or just a social occasion?"

"I think you'll find it works out all right," he said. And then, divining her dissatisfaction, he continued, "Burke's an Irishman and capable of fun, but he's simple and solid and sincere." He felt it rather absurd to be giving his friend an alliterative character like this and it ruffled him slightly to find Mary persisting in a certain blankness of aspect. "I believe you think Sibyl flimsy because she's an actress," he said. "What a Philistine you are, Mary!" It was good-natured enough, and Mary was not amiss with, "I hope she'll find Mr. Burke's solidity flattering." She added slyly: "It'll be a pity if he's merely Irish."

In their few meetings she had pursued loyally her

policy of being awfully nice to Sibyl, who reciprocated the sentiments with, perhaps, the addition of a shade of irony. Mary had been friendly and almost hearty, and Sibyl had positively achieved cheerfulness. Geoffrey was not so foolish as to insist on intimacy, though he held his protests in reserve. There was nothing very cunning in his selection of Burke for the fourth at their supper-party, though it had occurred to him that any excess of downrightness towards the German girl would react on Mary's sympathies. He wanted to look at Sibyl through Burke's eyes—or was it for Burke to see her through his?

Burke came first, and the drawing-room chill—Geoffrey couldn't help feeling that Mary lowered the temperature—was qualified by the blunt announcement. Burke heard for the first time that Geoffrey was engaged and that Sibyl was German, and the good fellow blinked nervously under the news. He turned to Mary, whose attitude was non-committal, and though he pulled himself together with an attempt at congratulation his scared sincerity made a queer boggle of this. And, indeed, it seemed to Geoffrey now that it was too bad to spring this on Burke, who had, for the moment, the aspect of the trapped. And then in came Sibyl, looking incredibly English, beautiful and appealing. She was at her best; she was, it seemed, even a little overwhelming to come in upon quiet folk like this. Mary greeted her gently, politely, and then suddenly took her into her arms. It was extraordinarily generous; it affected Geoffrey very much. For Sibyl was, indeed, at her best even

if her radiance was veiled; as the opening bud is better than the flower. Her beauty conquered Mary, and it seemed to Geoffrey very noble to be conquered so. The two women held one another closely, and then Sibyl was gently pushed away. In the time to come Mary and Sibyl were to sway to and fro in attraction and repulsion, but Geoffrey would remember this scene. He had a vision of them now which reversed old prepossessions; he saw Mary as impulsive and changeable, Sibyl as constant.

Burke looked on benevolently, and gallantly attacked the subject of the weather. The other greetings were almost perfunctory, but Sibyl had tears in her eyes. Rapidly she captured gaiety while Mary became demure. The emotion receded, but they could not at once lose consciousness of it. They passed into the dining-room.

By accident or design—which was it, Geoffrey wondered for Mary was usually alive to these things—there was a rather heavy collection of foliage in the middle of the table. Mary and Geoffrey were very much hidden from one another, though each commanded Sibyl and Burke. There was a degree of hilarity about Burke. Presently he might go away to think it over, but now the good fellow was doing his best for the company, and Sibyl responded. She kept peeping round the plants to see him, until it became a joke, and Burke peeped round at the other side so that they missed one another, and they all laughed like children. Geoffrey was for removing the obstruction, and Sibyl objected because "it gives Mr.

Burke a touch of mystery." Geoffrey rose and laid hands on it, and Burke objected to have his mystery tampered with. They had a comic struggle, and Geoffrey did positively remove the mass of greenery to the sideboard, leaving Burke, as Sibyl expressed it, "bare and bleak." It brought them all nearer to one another, and induced a wave of shyness. And then, reverting to "the touch of mystery," Geoffrey suggested that every one wanted a touch of something, that people were very nearly right and didn't require any gross reform. Burke insisted that Sibyl should apply the principle to the others as well, and, after reflection, she assigned to Mary a touch of sin. Geoffrey dared her to attempt his improvement, and was left cogitating with "A touch of brass."

"And yourself?" cried Burke.

Geoffrey said: "A touch of paint."

"Red paint?" said Burke. "Would you paint the lily?"

"No explanations," said Mary. "You must take it or leave it."

"An epigram," said Geoffrey rather ponderously, "is the indivisible atom."

Burke said they were getting too much like George Meredith, and that he wasn't up to it. He considered, however, that in a company of wits there should always be one man of solid sense to keep things within bounds. Sibyl said: "But he has no right to be witty too."

"Then," said Geoffrey, "a beautiful woman has no right to pay compliments."

His eyes met Sibyl's and she blushed. They were happy together; Mary was the benignant hostess, and Burke, no fool, held his own very well and was pleased at it. And then Sibyl broke the surface. They had been keeping off the grimmer preoccupations, but at some distant reference by Burke she turned to Geoffrey and said: "Does he know all about me?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Geoffrey, "but he knows you're a sort of German."

"You must not speak like that," she said. "I am German."

"I'm sorry. It was stupid," he said.

"Well, German's very like English, then," said Burke. "We'll accept you."

"You are generous, Mr. Burke," she said, "but I will not be accepted."

Poor Burke didn't quite know where he was, and glanced at Geoffrey, who was inscrutable. And poor Sibyl, now and in the days to come, was always wanting to know where she was. "I know I've spoilt it," she said. "We were all so jolly together. And you're here, Mr. Burke, as the sensible friend to see how nice I am and how practicable it all is. I know that's it, Geoffrey, but I mustn't be disguised. Perhaps you believe this rubbish about spying, Mr. Burke. Governesses—and why not actresses? We're very seductive, you know. You think because we're German we're capable of any baseness?"

Burke blundered into something about brave spies who loved their country. Mary said: "If you'd think less of country and nationality there need be no spies."

Then, generously, she said: "Sibyl and I are just two human beings, and you must be decent to us."

"I'm a German," cried Sibyl.

"And you love your country?" said Mary sharply. "How much? Do you love it well enough to betray us?"

"That would be to betray myself."

"There's something above country, then," said Mary.

"There's my immortal soul, Mary. You know I couldn't come here to betray you. It's all foolishness."

Mary pursued her point distressingly: "Won't your immortal soul take care of itself if, for the sake of this country of yours, you take a risk? Why should you not betray me, or I you, if one's country's everything?"

"Because we are two human beings, Mary."

They were both trembling. Geoffrey was perturbed, and Burke preserved admirably a judicious air. Mary said: "Of course, I know it's ridiculous to think of you as a spy or a traitor. But why shouldn't you be? This love of country seems to be answerable for every crime."

"It's inhuman not to love your country," said Sibyl. "Would you love other children as much as your own?"

"Nice to hear these young people accusing one another of inhumanity;"—Geoffrey addressed Burke, the seeming imperturbable—"what do you say?"

Burke, with a deep "Please" to Mary's hurried

invitation to a helping, considered the subject dispassionately. "I'm a bit afraid of Miss Drew," he said.

"Not of me?" cried Mary. "That's humiliating."

Burke eyed her gravely and her attempt at gaiety wore sharp and thin. "I'm an Irishman in England," he said. "I don't make much of all the blether over there. I'm afraid I'm not romantic. You've got to be decent with the people about you wherever you are."

Mary said: "You should be passionately for Ireland."

She checked any protests against inconsistency: "Not because it's Ireland. Because it's neglected and oppressed."

"Neglected!" said Geoffrey. "Oh, Lord!"

Sibyl said: "Must you abandon your country as soon as it's great?"

Geoffrey, striving in vain for the mildly pleasant, exclaimed, "Great Heavens! she's an Imperialist!"

"No," said Sibyl. "I only want to be quiet and happy.'

"That's it," said Mary. "That's what we poor people want. Then you come along with your country and your destiny and your flag and you'll commit any crime."

"I don't see, Mary," said Geoffrey, "why you shouldn't be passionately for England now. If Sibyl's German friends get their way we stand a fair chance of being oppressed."

"And if we get our way?"

"Well," said Geoffrey. "You can't be fair after

a war. There's a mighty momentum about it and the liberal and just spirits are overwhelmed. I'll grant you a great deal, Mary."

"Then let's hope that nobody will win," she said.

"And so the beastly war will go on for ever," said Geoffrey. "No. If you'll just hold Sibyl in her chair for a moment I'll say that I think we're a trifle better than her lot. It's better that we should win."

"I'm holding myself tight in my chair," said Sibyl, and to Geoffrey it appeared that this was hardly a jest. "We are great and strong and efficient and we might enslave the world. And so all the backwards and inefficients must close on us and smother us and make us keep pace with them. And they'll say humanity is saved."

"And we shall have to be a bit nippy to do it," said Burke.

"You're afraid of us, Mr. Burke?"

"If they're all as clever as you."

"Sibyl was brought up in England," said Geoffrey pleasantly. "It's environment that does it."

"Oh, you beware of German babies!" she said.

And then she blushed furiously and pitifully, perceiving that there might be a double meaning. It was agitating, and the others, in their commiseration, could not think of anything to turn the situation neatly. So she, herself, with the embarrassment yet upon her, the blood fading slowly from her cheeks, said bravely: "Geoffrey and I are going to snatch something beautiful out of all this. We have a compact. We are not going to be small and mean. He will be very gen-

erous and I will do my best. Oh, you'll see! We are not going to be silent and timid. I think you are a great people. I love the English. I have loved them. Geoffrey will try to see the good in us. And if we have children they will not be ashamed."

All embarrassment had gone. Geoffrey looked at Mary and was content. He had a ridiculous notion that Burke was going to wipe his eyes with his napkin. Sibyl raised her head slowly and looked at Geoffrey, and when he smiled her eyes kindled suddenly and she smiled nervously, tremulously; a change of mood could not come quickly. Then Mary said: "Your spirit is beautiful, but Geoffrey wants to fight against Germany."

Sibyl's head was bowed again. "Even that," she said. Mary looked at her attentively, and then she turned to Burke: "Can they do it?"

"Do what?" the poor fellow said, and then he stammered, "I mean—yes, it's difficult, very difficult."

"You don't think I'd do anything very dreadful, Mr. Burke?" said Sibyl, trying to relieve him.

"I shouldn't regard you as a practical danger," he said.

"But to me?" said Geoffrey boldly. "Never mind about the country. What of the danger to me?"

"Ah!" said Burke. "You don't matter much."

And as he looked at Sibyl they realized he meant it was she that mattered. Geoffrey said, "You're an impressionable Irishman."

Burke, under Sibyl's shy, kind glance, felt that he was that and modestly tried to turn the subject with

some platitude about the hopelessness of ever getting the world straight again.

"And yet," said Geoffrey, "how capable everything is of solution. Look at us four! How different we all are and how we can agree."

"And every one wants everybody else to have the biggest peach," said Sibyl.

"Well," said Burke, "when I go to dine with Lindsay he wants me to have the biggest potato, but that doesn't mean he's going to raise my salary."

"'God mend all!' as Queen Katherine said," and Geoffrey looked benignly round the table.

"And we trust Him at least to look after the chosen race," said Mary with a sarcastic eye on Geoffrey and, it seemed, a kindly one on Sibyl.

"It's difficult, though," said Sibyl, "when the chosen race comes up against the super-race."

"Ingrate!" cried Geoffrey. "These wits! They're at the mercy of their epigrams." He was delighted with her.

"Even the angels didn't do much," said Mary, "when they revolted against God."

"Ah!" said Burke. "You need a long spoon to sup with the devil."

"Really, Mr. Burke!" cried Sibyl, "are you referring to me?" Heaven knows what he had meant, but they all laughed freely, and Mary said it was time for them—the ladies—to be going. "My nice supper has hardly had a chance with all this talk," she said, and Sibyl confirmed this with a rueful, "Oh, dear!" and a hurried, self-reproachful glance at the dishes

within view. Burke assured Mary earnestly that he, at least, had done justice to it and she thanked him laughing. Sibyl, with a light affectation of greediness, rifled bon-bon boxes as she and Mary withdrew. At the door she turned to Burke and said: "You're going to talk things over with him and he won't tell me everything."

Geoffrey said genially: "There's a keyhole for spies."

Left alone with Burke he fell suddenly serious. They smoked in silence till Geoffrey said: "The other night at the theater I watched her and I said to myself: 'Are these Germans too clever for us?' And to-night—" He stopped and gazed at his friend.

"I think these women are too clever for us," said Burke.

Geoffrey's mind took in Mary and he nodded. She might not have Sibyl's wit, but you could not think of Mary as inferior and his family pride was touched. He returned to the point.

"Do you advise me to throw her over?"

"You won't."

"The cool, common sense of it."

"You don't want it."

"Take it that I do."

"There are lots of nice girls."

"Fetch 'em and put 'em against her."

"I'm afraid it's not going to be easy for you."

"You old scoundrel, if I gave her up I believe you'd propose to her yourself."

"I'm the romantic Irishman. Why did she say I wanted mystery?"

"Poor devil! I believe you're in love with her."

"Rubbish! I don't fall in love with my friends' sweethearts."

"Burke, you are our friend."

"If you'll have it so."

When, presently, they went to the drawing-room the two girls were sitting silent on each side of the fire, and Geoffrey saw the traces of tears in Mary's eyes.

CHAPTER XX

STIRRUP-CUP

THE next afternoon Geoffrey was in his room at the office, clearing up various matters before he left, when Burke came in, charged, it appeared, with second thoughts. He had found last night's entertainment so agreeable and stimulating that he feared he had not been quite the candid friend. Poor old Tim! He considered that Sibyl had an extraordinary amount of "personal magnetism," and this, added to the geniality of the occasion, had shifted him a bit from his moorings. And now what he had to say amounted to this: that it was a more serious matter to marry a German girl than it had appeared last night. "It's all very well," said Burke, "to have liberal sentiments about niggers, but you can't let your daughter marry one." And then he blushed at the grossness of the analogy and admitted that this was going too far. "I'll tell you what, though," he said; "if a *Herald* man marries a German they'll say how unsound we all are."

"I've thought of it," said Geoffrey, "but I shan't be a *Herald* man in a week or two. Besides, Lindsay would be the first to tell me to disregard that."

Burke shook his head, and cast about for arguments rather faintly. His heart was not in it, and he was but answering the dubious calls of conscience.

"Do you really think, Burke," said Geoffrey with sudden animation, "that I ought to throw over the girl? Would you think better of me?"

"Of course not," said Burke.

"Then what the devil are you bothering about?"

And really it looked as though Burke's object was merely to make his friend uncomfortable. Geoffrey suggested this and Burke was indignant in his denial. Presently: "What I like about her," he burst out, "is that she won't throw over her own lot." The true Burke was in this generous appreciation. He had rid his conscience of a burden, and felt the better for it. He would not have Geoffrey desert the charming lady, but he must realize that to stick to her was no light matter. "And you've got plenty on hand as it is," he said. "Your sister, now—she's magnificent, but a bit staggering. But I mustn't talk of this."

"I'd like your impression," said Geoffrey.

"Oh, well! You know I had a little talk with her last night when you were—well; I was very much interested, you know, and she was extremely kind and gentle and most respectful to me—made me feel a person of consideration. I dare say you know her attitude. She thinks a deep humiliation may be good for us, and that it might be God's plan for our salvation."

"And, conversely," said Geoffrey, "that the triumph of Germany would show His anger with them?"

"I dare say," said Burke. "What I felt was that you might as well try to argue with Jesus Christ."

"She's not what the orthodox call religious," said Geoffrey. "She invents God now and then for her purposes. She calls Him up."

Burke stared at him with an inquiring air which struck Geoffrey as comic. And then Burke changed the subject thoroughly with, "By the bye, we're going to dine you."

Geoffrey objected that, in the circumstances, the farewell dinner was not in the best of taste; it was apt to imply too much when the guest was off to the wars. He was flattered, however, and consented to grace the occasion. Out of a subtle regard for Geoffrey the dinner was held, not at the garish big hotel, but at the old, rather superior, rather dowdy one associated with the festivities of a bygone Manchester. It had its character and some pride of present achievement; the dinner was good at least. A dozen or more men attended it, and Geoffrey, for once in his life, had the center of the stage. It was a curious sensation to be the target for congratulation, for appreciation, which, when it came to his turn to speak, he could describe with a good infusion of sincerity as ill-deserved. But Arden's modesty was a tradition of the office; in part it was a jocular tradition.

He had a childish desire to shatter this tradition, to assert himself, and perhaps he did succeed in puzzling his friends. His health was drunk in the approved fashion, and most of the dozen were permitted to have their say. Secretan was on his amazing adventure

and Round was in the chair. Yet with Lindsay and Secretan away, loyalty to the *Herald* was always implicit, and Geoffrey enjoyed the intimacy of a comradeship so generously extended to him, so rarely, it seemed, available. He glowed with a proper pride when Round said: "There are no intrigues in this office," even though it might occur to him in some twist of humility that he would never have had the kind of courage necessary for intrigue. He listened critically to all that was said about him, anxious to detach from the words of compliment and comradeship something material to his self-respect. There was not much, though a common emotion of fellowship glowed reassuringly; it was something to be one with the rest. Of course they found things to say, for it is a poor life that holds no chance of friendly comment. They touched on his connection with the arts, with commerce, on his prodigious accomplishments in miscellaneous reviewing; it was recalled that he had, on occasion, positively written the long leader without disaster. Round had some beautifully phrased, non-committal references to his books and plays, suitable for any one from Homer downwards, and Geoffrey wondered whether, without any shade of resentment, he might presently suggest that these compliments were the pure matter of goodwill, that Round had never read a line of him. Attar spoke with more knowledge, but it remained for Polson, the new, shy sub-editor, whose inclusion in the company had only been determined by Geoffrey's expressed desire, to speak the distinctive word. It was distinct rather than

distinguished, it had the crudeness of young enthusiasm, it was out of gear with the rest. It made Geoffrey feel queerly grateful to him, queerly apologetic to the others.

Then came Geoffrey's turn, and he was conscious of the wish that Lindsay could be there to listen to his explanations. They included a defense of drudgery, a defense of skepticism. He defined his position with some seriousness, and the company regarded him rather blankly; this was hardly in the spirit of a genial occasion, but he did gain their interest. He wanted to say to Lindsay that you can be a faithful servant even with the core of your life outside the service; at large, he wanted to say—and in some measure did say—that self-mistrust is a form of skepticism and that skepticism at its best gives the greatest measure of truth of which this world is capable. He pursued the idea fancifully. We can't all be stimulated to do the work of the world by the illusions of egoism, by the innate or pseudo-logical convictions. He rode his hobby to comic dissolution, he represented himself as a martyr to truth. On his plays and novels he touched very highly in the "prophet without honor" vein, but with a slight hauteur, perhaps a little arrogance, declining, it seemed, the position of an amiable nonentity who amused himself with amateur irrelevancies. And then it did seem to him that his apologia was getting a little uncomfortable, his audience a little chilly, and he switched off to friendliness and jollity. They all responded to that, and, after all, he made a success of

his speech. Attar, seated on his right, congratulated him upon it, and particularly on his extrication from the serious vein. "As to that notion of yours about having a life of one's own away from the *Herald,*" he said, "I wish Lindsay had been here. We're all in the same position. But, mind you, it's a condition of loyalty that you're not absolutely attached; loyalty implies a soul of your own."

Geoffrey long remembered incidents of that dinner, he remembered dishes and the effect of wine on his brain if not on his palate. He was older than some of the men and felt older than most; he craved the assurance that these clear, competent young men did not regard him as a variety of the solemn ass, and their plaudits were welcome to him. Round dominated the occasion, and Geoffrey recalled Attar's word of him, that he was too lucid for epigram. His writing about the war was already making a reputation. "If there is to be calamity," he had said, "let's define it." He did not seek calamity half-way, but he was far from the alternations of panic and fatuous optimism that marked so much of the current comment. "Depressing," the casual readers called him, and more and more of them returned to him for the solidities of reassurance. Round, like any other patriotic Englishman, deplored the war, and yet it could not make him miserable. War was his study, to move calmly among the forces of death and destruction became his life. He never made any attempt to touch the machinery; glimpses of veritable trenches, concussions of big guns, humanity on the march, were irrelevant

to his purpose. He did not desire to buttonhole generals nor to be made free of the higher gossip. His intellect reduced all to its proportionate value; he was humane, but he was not diverted by humanity; he was a politician, but politics had no more than their place. Now he took his prominent part in all the genial exchanges of wit, while he and Geoffrey attempted a definition of the relations of politics and morals. Round had cited the Dreyfus case as the awful example of politics forced to the extreme, and Geoffrey found another in the Appin murder. "More and more," said Round, "I see the advantages of a simple righteousness." He reflected on Geoffrey's assertion that Christianity now had its great chance and was losing it. "You can't have the pure, primitive article, of course," said Geoffrey. "That would forbid our going to war at all. But isn't it possible to have a compromise?" The clerical surrender to all the basenesses of hate and revenge was one of Geoffrey's obsessions. Round agreed that the spy panic was all nonsense, and the persecution of innocent Germans a sort of blood lust. It only required a little intelligence to find the few real professional spies and shoot 'em. Attar, joining in, suggested the scene at the German Intelligence Department on the arrival of the post. Thousands of reports from Great Britain and Ireland, the colonies, the neutrals, the armies, the navies, the railway-carriages, and the watering-places. Gossip and extracts from *Whittaker's Almanac*. Despair of the Department attempting to cope with all, and months behind already. Discovery of serious dis-

crepancies between conversations overheard on the Lancashire and Yorkshire, and on the London and North-Western Railways. German thoroughness at fault, but coping bravely with the situation. Enormous growth of the Department. Recognition that choice must be made between great reduction in sources of information or abandonment of connection with War Department. German thoroughness prevails, and Intelligence Department becomes purely historical. Relief of military chiefs. Great struggle between Department and Army for men. Triumph of German historical spirit. End of war.

So Attar, with some assistance from the others, while Brecher enlarged on the connection between the army and the public schools. Brecher, the Zionist, who looked forward to growing oranges at Jaffa, when this wretched war was over—he was more likely to be Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Jew Republic—had a reasoned scorn for the public schools and his concession of small virtues to them was particularly scornful. Tradition, discipline, gallantry, of course, and such things are good when dominated by brain. If not, tradition is merely adherence to the ramshackle, discipline is slavery, and gallantry idiotic. He quoted the instance of the five hundred young Frenchmen from the military school who swore an oath together —to do what? To serve their country to the utmost of their power? No. To engage in battle wearing white gloves so as to provide a good cock-shy for the enemy. What devotion! What gallantry! The sentimentalists were thrilled, but imagine Brecher's fury

of contempt! "And your Dr. Arnold," he cried,— "What's this tradition that he set up? To teach men how to die. What the devil's the good of that? You want to live, not to die. Teach men how to live. Face death, of course, but don't play tricks with the infernal old machine. Your nice public-school boy is no good when he comes up against the brainy blackguard."

"Let's have brainy chivalry, then," said Geoffrey.

"I want people to be decent," said Brecher moderately.

Geoffrey looked round the table and it occurred to him that half the men were young enough to fight. He had thought of them as gallant young men, but these had not rushed to the great adventure like Secretan and the others. Those public-school boys whose native hue had not been sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, would go to it eagerly or resignedly when their time came; these had their preoccupations, their hesitations, their mistrust of the first rush. Geoffrey did not know it, but his own action was working on the feelings and in the brains of several of these men. They had regarded Secretan's enlistment as a brilliant freak, but Arden's had the significance of the world movement. They had their work already; they would have to be torn up by the roots; not very deep, perhaps, but still roots. Their enthusiasms had a reasonable basis. Several of them were capable of swimming against the stream; all of taking a direction.

In the meantime they were lads ready for a lark, and conscious, too, that it was "up to them" to justify the *Herald* as a school of the lighter humanities.

Geoffrey was not altogether averse from such things, but though he might grow familiar in one relation with his companions he would remain shy of another. So he did not take part in the orgy of high spirits that followed the dinner, and next day he heard the details of it rather wistfully. They were not very alarming, and perhaps the most picturesque incident was Burke's progress down Portland Street on the roof of the four-wheeler. Burke had been a little subdued during the formal progress of the dinner, but in the later proceedings he was said to have "taken hold," finding opportunity for an expression of nationality. Attar justified his own participation in the revels by the need for a judicious friend of strong character to head Burke away from the police court. And yet it was Burke to whom Geoffrey turned when he wanted the sane proportion of things. A queer world.

Geoffrey walked home through the quiet streets, and this time he thought indulgently of Mary sitting up for him in her mistaken loyalty. She was there, no doubt, waiting to hear all about it, and whether he expanded or contracted depended on the chances of his mood. There was so much in the evening that she would not appreciate; Mary, boggling over the minutiæ of righteousness, was scared by the large, loose life of men of the world. When they had been dead for centuries it didn't matter. Perhaps to some of the Marys of their time, Oliver Cromwell and Martin Luther had been coarse, reprehensible creatures, but now the dross was separable from the gold. She had something of the historical sense, and didn't trouble

about faded gossip. Ready as she was to make heroes of the leader writers who would espouse lost or doubtful causes, Geoffrey had learnt caution in describing their sayings and doings.

To-night he was conscious of the fumes of wine in his brain, when he found her pathetically warming a bowl of bread and milk for him. Bread and milk! It represented the plunge into domesticity, and, rather surprisingly, he presently found himself eating with fair appetite. He was good-natured, and some persistence of his elation carried him through a pretty lively account of the evening's doings. And Mary, it appeared from the books strewn about, had been reading Rossetti and the Carolinian poets, for whom she had a curious affection. Seeing him glance at the books, she mentioned that Milly Warde had come in. This meant that Mary had not got on very far with her poets, and Geoffrey was tempted freakishly to ask whether Milly had been reading Rossetti. Mary was silent for a moment, and then, in a little burst of half-indignant defense of her friend, she said: "Milly is not exotic."

Geoffrey was driven to reflect on the inconsistencies of the sincere. Mary read Rossetti, but it was a sort of virtue for Milly not to read him; it did not consort with her particular genius, perhaps. And Geoffrey felt that there was another implication. Sibyl was exotic. In the early days of their acquaintance, Mary had used the word carelessly or tentatively, about her, and Geoffrey had not altogether disliked it. Now he broke through the little play of senti-

ments between him and Mary by saying: "There is no harm in being exotic when you are as true as steel." And Mary looked at him with sullen eyes, and then conquered herself amazingly. "Yes," she said, "I believe Sibyl is that." They trembled on the brink of some outward expression of emotion, of sympathy, and perhaps the essential was accomplished. It was queer how she seemed to hanker after Milly, championing her because of her defects, as you would defend and be kind to the crippled or infirm. If he had brought home as a wife some peasant lass, or even some preposterous person from the streets, Mary would have been the devoted friend. Sibyl, as the saying is, intrigued her. She blew hot and cold. She would placate him by quoting something from her Carolinians that applied to Sibyl, and he liked it, though he might have liked better something from the great, thundering poets.

Earlier in the evening, Mary and Milly had talked about Sibyl. Milly had been the hearty, generous one, and Mary seemed always to be making subtle reservations. In her pitiful heart she knew that this good, staunch girl was suffering the loss of a possible, an imagined, a desired lover. Who could help loving Geoffrey? She was conscious of a comic reduction to absurdity in the feeling that the loss of Geoffrey was a serious matter to the maidenhood of Britain. She knew that she must fight against the idea that everybody was perpetually losing something, just as she must refrain from dwelling on the slaughter in the war. On a summer evening she had been struck to

sadness by realizing the mortality of the midges. She had tried to believe in an immortality for midges, in the persistence of all forms of consciousness. And Geoffrey remembered the occasion, long ago, when kind parents had exchanged startled glances at the passion of the girl who refused an immortality that did not embrace dogs, mice, or even black beetles, though she shuddered at the idea of the perpetuation of these. She had hardly changed, for her inveterate truthfulness perceived the logical difficulty in limiting immortality. She could be sarcastic at that fatuousness of mankind in conceiving itself as the chosen race. Oh, you could come up against something very sharp in Mary!

Milly pursued her with formulas of a moderate intelligence, but she had to fall back sometimes on the fond platitude that "Mary was a queer girl." Milly felt a great deal on the subject of Mary and realized her own inarticulateness. Yet she was useful in giving the plain sense of the occasion to her friend, and on this particular evening she had been round with her. It appeared that Sibyl was to be away playing Juliet, and with some beating about the bush it was made manifest that, in the circumstances—Geoffrey being the obvious circumstance—a flesh and blood Romeo was intolerable. Mary would not accept the idea of a bride for Geoffrey being kissed by other men, and actresses, unhappily, may be kissed a good deal even in the classical parts. It was not their fault, of course, but their misfortune. There was no way round if plays were to be acted, and Mary worried

herself between the impossibility of forbidding them —she was not a mere Puritan—and the horror of the maiden sacrifice involved in being kissed. But Milly made short work of her and, indeed, she was divided against herself. "Nonsense," cried Milly. "It isn't real kissing," and she compared Mary to the Miss Poles with their fine shades and nice feelings. Certainly Meredith would be on the side of art and Sibyl, and in the discussion, which was hardly an argument, Mary was left with nothing but a feeling and that, she felt, was an ungenerous one. Milly was not one to lose an advantage by niceties of consideration, and she asked Mary whether she looked forward to loss of delicacy, to blunted feelings, when she began to nurse. Conscious that this was not a perfect analogy, Mary did not continue the subject. She fell back upon domestic policies, and, really, there was a lot to consider now; the house was to be shut up, the furniture stored, and life itself to find new channels.

She was immersed in these distracting preparations when Sibyl called to say good-by before setting off on her tour. Geoffrey, on the point of beginning his training, was out of the way, and Sibyl, indeed, had chosen to have it so. With the three of them together she had a ridiculous consciousness of the struggle for Geoffrey; the struggle was attenuated to little jealousies, faint resentments. Indeed, the signs of it were chiefly Mary's reactions—the evident impulses of friendliness from which Sibyl, in supersensitive mood, would infer the secret thoughts that were not so friendly. Sibyl thought she had never met any one

so difficult to approach as Mary. Now and then, when she had time to think, she found it very interesting, but she had her pride and dignity; she was ready to respond to kindnesses that were sisterly, but she would not be pitied for being a German. And sometimes she missed the point that Mary, in the breadth of her humanity, was German too. Occasionally, indeed, it had not been humanity but a wilfulness of opposition which had made her extol the German and even the Prussian virtues, as the disconcerted Geoffrey had realized. It was an astounding fact that Mary had read Carlyle's *Frederick the Great,* and was now threatening to read it again.

Sibyl, sitting politely on the edge of a chair and looking very elegant, did not appear to have much in common with the great Frederick, nor could she be plausibly ranked with the desolate and oppressed. The two women eyed one another, talking trivialities, and each was conscious of the impalpable barrier. There was no bridge to cross it, and Sibyl felt that the only way was a flying leap. If need be she must ravage Mary's feelings; she must not pretend that all was colorless between her and Geoffrey. And so she burst out: "Oh, Mary! Isn't it a beautiful idea of ours—Geoffrey's and mine?"

And Mary, detesting herself for the coldness of her voice, said, "What idea?"

Sibyl tried again. Gallantly she said: "You've got to be nice to us about it. You know what a child is with an idea. It's cruel to be scornful of a child's idea. I think I've infected Geoffrey with it. If I

thought he was just pretending and didn't see anything in it I should be miserable. It would be—it would be disastrous. No, it is not childish, even if I am like a child. It's very, very serious. It's as serious as our love for one another." She stood up as if to go, as if nothing more could be said on her side. Mary felt the relief of being overcome; she said gently: "Tell me about it again."

Sibyl sat down. "I feel the death of that gallant old man in France," she said.

"Who?" said Mary.

"Lord Roberts is dead. He was the enemy of Germany, of course, and the Liberals used to think him foolish when he warned you against us. But things weren't so bitter then, and he was single-minded and brave and wanted to help his country. I like people to die in the fullness of their power. He was old and in a strange country, and he must have felt useless. The greatest things in the world were happening and he was failing and dying. And yet it was good for him to die among it all. It was a sort of glory. He has the soldier's face."

Mary was bewildered. "I don't understand," she said. "Of course, it's very nice of you—very good of you to talk of Lord Roberts like this. Oh, what rubbish! No. Why shouldn't you? But—is this part of the idea?"

"Oh, dear!" said Sibyl. "I'm afraid it's rather like rehearsing for Geoffrey. I shall say something like that when I see him again. I suppose we actor people get into the way of saying things again and

again." Then she added: "And trying to make them better."

She had been sincere, but this little bit of illustration from her art struck coldly on Mary, who had told herself before that she must not be on the lookout for the histrionic in Sibyl. However, Mary said mildly enough: "Why must you talk about Lord Roberts to Geoffrey?"

"The idea is," said Sibyl, "that he is English and I German, and yet that I am to enter into all the noble and beautiful things on his side, and he into those on mine. The stupid people here would say that he will find nothing. Well, I must risk that. Oh, Mary! It is rather funny to hear him praising the German method and competence. He's so careful and punctilious. I'm afraid somethimes that the idea will fizzle out in a joke. But it mustn't. It shan't. And we've so much in common. German boys, English boys, going to the slaughter. Geoffrey's a man and that's different. Am I unnatural in feeling that it isn't so bad for him to go? That's when I get out of myself. We must get out of ourselves or it will be too terrible. Face things and then put them aside. In a year from now Geoffrey may be killed. In one year or in fifty years. It's awful, but it's not impossible. What a lot we can stand! It's no use pretending we can't stand things when we can. A few discomforts and slights—even persecutions—don't seem much when there's death about. Yes, he gives the Germans the benefit of the doubt so politely, and I pay handsome compliments to the English people. We're only at the

fringe of things. The idea has got to be tested yet. We're rather shy of the German atrocities. Oh! I can't talk about that."

"Behind it all," said Mary, "there's your beautiful affection for one another."

"How nice you can be! How generous you can be!" cried Sibyl. "I had begun to wonder whether I was making any impression on you."

"Impression on me?" said Mary frowning. She detected the cloven foot.

"Ah!" said Sibyl. "I say the wrong things. You're so dreadfully sensitive. Well, but why shouldn't I wish to impress you, to move you? Do you think I use you just like an audience? I don't, but remember that audiences are very serious things to me. They are not contemptible. But, Mary, you did say the right thing. Affection. That's it. We may have very little time. A flare of passion is not enough. We want to be wise and safe and permanent. And it may be months, not years. We want the best, the finest. If Geoffrey is to die he shall have that first. I am not unworthy of him, Mary. Am I taking him from you? It has to be. I've thought of that. If it were only I to be considered—but you can be—you are infinitely generous. It is easy to be generous to him. I ask you humbly—humbly, Mary—to be kind to me. He would like it. I'm not acting."

Mary could not speak but she held out her arms.

CHAPTER XXI

TRAINING

FROM a camp in the Yorkshire dales Geoffrey wrote to Sibyl:—

"I feel like a timid swimmer who has taken the plunge and come up gasping, but relieved and even exhilarated. I'm in for it; I've changed my life and so far changed myself that little familiarities of body and soul take on a strange aspect. We're in huts and a barn or two—in the spring I think there will be hundreds of tents—and my old self is still uncomfortable, but a new self is growing over it and that gets on pretty well. The military life is wildly exciting and it's an awful bore. You get bored to the stage of positive wretchedness. Will you believe that I turn on the vision of you sometimes because I can't stand things as they are any longer? This is to acknowledge that I don't think of you all the time? Well, do you know, I use you with a certain economy. I *don't* think of you all the time. We're going to be honest lovers, aren't we, and I'll acknowledge that sometimes I forget all about you. Why! we forget all about the war. We haven't time for it with all these really important things pressing upon us. I'm intensely conscious of my body, of my poor old limbs and my digestion; a

sore toe is very much more to the point than the question of a Russian advance or retreat. As to the cause—the sacred cause—one never thinks of it unless with a conscious effort. One made a choice and must stick to it. Perhaps it was a frigid moral choice or perhaps a generous enthusiasm—now we're back on ourselves. I had a touch of toothache the other day—it's nothing, it's gone—and the only thing in the world worth considering was the absence of toothache. My idea of happiness was to be a sort of Prisoner of Chillon—just to exist not having toothache in as much dark and damp as you please. Ah! The body! The concern with the body! Write me some jolly, witty letters. I must have an intellectual life. Save me from mental torpor. My dearest, I'm mad for love of you. It's cruel to keep us apart. Did I say that I forgot you sometimes? What nonsense! Or I forget you as one forgets the sky and the sun, breath and life. I forget you as I forget myself.

"We're in a sort of park, and there's a big house near where a Lord Somebody lives, a fine-looking old boy who beams on us when he meets us in his car, and reeks of a goodish brand of patriotism. He's rather decrepit, and has sons in the army. I think he looks on us as being garnished for the sacrifice, fattened for the butcher. When the first drafts came along he made us a speech that was curiously, finely emotional. Emotional and yet austere. He welcomed us as his guests and gave us to understand that it was our privilege to die for our country. I think it hadn't struck us all in that light. We were thinking of a

pleasant outing with some excitement of bursting shells and a triumphant progress to Berlin. I fancy he was told to draw it a little milder next time. He's a popular figure, and the officers go to lunch and dine with him sometimes. They come back smoking large cigars and looking very confident about the military position. It's queer now to think of a swell dinner-table and coffee and liqueurs and joining the ladies in the drawing-room. The ladies especially. I hanker after exquisite womankind. You, of course, but as you're not about, I don't know but what I should like a little to be going on with. We *are* to be frank, aren't we? Frank, frank (but not too frank).

. . . . . .

"I resume to say that I'm lance-corporal. Hooray! The first step. I see that I shall get on. I can't help getting on. I'm an intelligent man and among rather a plain lot. I'm afraid I must include the officers. When I get back to the old life I shall begin to salute, Lindsay and Round and the rest. They're miles ahead of all these people. Yes, I shall prostrate myself and bump my forehead on the ground. I don't say that the officers are all duffers. I don't get at the working of their minds. Very nice fellows some of them are, and nice little bits of humanity peep out. They're ashamed of this because it's not soldierly. They're pretending to be soldiers and overdo it. They imitate the two or three old soldiers that are here. It's like imitating Irving or George Alexander. But the whole machine is rather absurd. It seems to be a machine for machinery's sake; I suppose it's really for making

us all into machines that will advance and retire and let off guns, and occasionally topple over into the ditch.

" Perhaps you don't think much of my being a lance-corporal, but let me tell you that it means *authority*. I've more authority—or a different sort—than railway directors and mill managers. I can grind down my fellow men and they can't put on their coats and go home. I can ' manage them till they cry '—as the little girl said when her mother left her in charge of the babies. The first step is the great step. You begin to see what a terrific instrument this army is. And one has to be a bit sharp. I mean to keep humane, but I'm going to be d—d sharp, I can tell you. Ought we to manage them by love? I feel Mary at my elbow. Privates don't love N.C.O's. I think they do sometimes make beneficent figures of officers. With despair I realize that I can't reform the British army. I can't spiritualize it, Mary. Yes, I'm conscious of Mary. She baffles me; we're more than ever on different planes. I don't say she's wrong. The young man with great possessions had a simple problem; it's the young man with great prepossessions that's in a fix. (Rather witty! What?)

" I told you we live in huts. It's a squash, and here I am in positive contact with dozens, hundreds, thousands (it seems) of my fellow men. I sleep with them, I feed with them, and I know the smell of the battalion as a dog knows that of his master. I don't like it, but I get accustomed to it. I feel that I'm passing through it, and that there's something in the

idea of purgatory, though I used to think of that as fiercer and cleaner. One could write of it all like a 'realistic' novelist, but I won't. I do feel sometimes that I'm in a morass, and I try to fix my eyes or my mind on a star. These things are fleabites. Yes, but you may wake o' nights with fleabites, hating mankind. There's snobbery in matters of cleanliness, and I don't want to be too clean. Queer stuff this, for a love letter? But we're serious people, aren't we, and we're in a real world? I've a feeling that I'm getting down to the rock and that I can do it. That's the discovery. I can do it. My spirits rise at that. I wonder, sometimes, whether I could have done it without you. I suppose I could have held on doggedly, but you are the star that is always shining over the morass, and when there's a star the morass is as good as anything else. And it seems so irrelevant that I'm preparing to fight Germans and you're a German girl. (I don't quite admit it.) That's far away. We haven't come to that. The great Idea, your magnificent Idea transcends everything. It *is* a great idea, Sibyl (Gretchen, or whatever your name is. I shall always think of you as Sibyl).

"What was I saying? Oh! About these men, my pals. What are they like? Well, you know, they're all different. 'As like as two peas' we say, but the peas aren't like. One's a good pea and the other a bad 'un. There are some bad 'uns here, but I think most are sound or sound in parts. There are some ugly, dirty, lewd brutes, and—yes, let's admit it—rather a sickening amount of thieving and bawdry.

There would be plenty of drunkenness, but that's not easy. Yes, some of my comrades are thieves, and, as long as I'm a man and not a lance-corporal, they don't cease to be my comrades. I fancy some of the thieves and blackguards (not all—don't let us follow the conventional novelists, and regard blackguardism and the virtues as very much the same) for comrades in a tight corner. We're all going through the mill, and when we emerge at the other end the values will be different. I'm not quite sure yet whether I shall be a finer creature or broken or crushed. This, of course, is only a first process. The test, the real trial is to come.

" Yes, I'm considerably puzzled to know why many of these men enlisted. I think some of them were drunk, and couldn't see beyond their noses. Others had flashy impulses when the band played. Don't let us dissect the patriotic ardors. A lot of these fellows would very much like to get out of it, but they're caught by the machine and know it. And don't think I'm growing cynical. On the contrary I'm amazed, I'm thrilled by the persistence of devotion. These are common men of a surprising nobility. Heroes? Well, most of us are heroes yet. I felt myself a hero when I walked through the Manchester streets, with the rest of the rabble to be turned into soldiers. I was extraordinarily happy. I had the heroic emotions. I doubt if you have them after the event. I can conceive a V.C. with an ugly, hateful memory of his great deed. It was a time of doubt and terror. You are callous, you are an inhuman freak if you are not

subject to these. We've a wrong conception of the heroic as something with a smooth, impeccable surface. It's mistaking the façade for the building. And these true heroes smile and strut, when the people acclaim them and the banners wave, while in their hearts there's the grim reality. Fancies, fancies. We haven't come to this yet.

" I've time for fancies. I see a long, long vista or avenue, and there I am going down it confidently enough. But my figure is lost in the mists and I don't know what happens to it. I imagine a man who does all the preliminaries splendidly: the right tone, the right spirit. His leave takings are beautiful, every pose and gesture right, and then—out he goes into the dark.

" One wants to get rid of the fear of fear. I could wish that the training included being fired at with real bullets. (By very bad shots and at enormous distances, of course.) I suppose, when it comes to the point, I shall be very much like anybody else—exceedingly funky at first and gradually becoming brave. What I don't like—and I'm not sure whether it's creditable or despicable—is the idea of others being braver than I. They may be rasher if they like, or bigger fools, but I rather resent people getting ahead of one in the nobilities. Forgive me, Sibyl, if I'm writing like a prig. I wouldn't say such things to any one but you. These are my secret thoughts. They'll stand accusingly against me if I turn out a rotter. But I couldn't be a coward under your eyes, and you are always with me.

"Now is that just a nice bit of lover's rhetoric or a simple sincerity? I don't know. I suppose it's sincere now, but there lurks in my mind the notion of a hullabaloo of screaming shells and tremendous explosions in which the loved one's image and stimulation might be attenuated. However, it's folly to be always facing facts, especially when the facts are distant, hazy surmises. One isn't simple enough. Or is this another affectation? (Do I bore you?) If there's to be progress in the world, it can't be just a reversion to simplicities. We're emerging from them. Subtleties for ever! Hurrah for modern poets and dim, contortionist painters!

"I'm being awfully long. What an appalling, devastating blow it would be to realize that I *do* bore you. Would your sincerity run to telling me so? Just a hint? No, an honest, plain word. I've a vein of garrulity, but I could stop it up, close it out. You might make a better man of me and a more tolerable lover. I should respect you. Every man is the better for one in the eye occasionally. I should have said 'in the neck,' but I wasn't sure whether the idiom would be familiar to a Teuton. Do you like facetious insults on your German birth? I don't know you exactly yet. (Thank Heaven!) Don't get into the way of shrinking and not telling me.

"Long as this letter is I must tell you of a man I've come across here. He's of what we may call the respectable artisan class (How even the conscientious literary man runs to these neat-looking *clichés!* Why don't I say that he's a cotton operative? Or why

don't I be more definite and say he's a minder in the spinning-room? But as you don't know what a minder is, this is getting *too* definite. And there's a nice little epitome of the art of exposition for you) and his name is Robert Turner. We made acquaintance one night, when we lay alongside of one another and had trouble with fleas. I was friendly and aimed at a comradely bluntness, but very soon he accused me of having a cultivated voice. He wasn't exactly resentful, he didn't certainly call me a toff, but I was made aware that I belonged to the capitalist class. I ridiculed his distinctions and defended the cultivated voice. He bristled at the notion of condescension, and wanted to know what I meant by this gentleman ranker business. Why hadn't I taken a commission? He snorted slightly at my explanations—and they weren't very convincing, I'm afraid—that I liked a bit of whole-hogging, and he muttered something about playing at it. He was particularly scornful of the idea that this war was going to reconcile the classes, that lion and lamb (or eagle and serpent—he knew something about Shelley) would lie down pleasantly together. And all the time were were together he was rather nice to me and did several considerate things.

" We had one or two rather tentative discussions on democracy. He was truculent at first, but I think I hit rather a nice manner with him—why not! I liked him—and chaffed a little. He sneered at manners, and I said that they were what mattered most in the world, but that they must go deep and include everything. He quieted down, and I really believe

that he began to imitate me a little, and then became conscious of it and hectored. He had a pathetic aspect, but he was too good for mere pathos. He made me realize what shaky stuff my politics are, but his contempt for Liberalism was excessive. We are just to be cut down or effaced, it seems; he ridicules the idea of our making concessions that would get us into line with realities. Like poor German girls in England, there's no place for us. I bothered him by asking what he would do in my place. He asked what my income was and how it was obtained. He was very respectful to the *Herald,* and appeared to regard it as the finest futility in existence. I made him acknowledge that—'in this transition period'—it was more than that. 'Are you going to arrive at a period where there isn't any transition?' says I, feeling myself an acute controversialist, and that bothered him a bit too. He had a great deal of intellectual honesty.

"On the general subject I acknowledged that the classes we belong to—middle, capitalist, aristocratic, or what not—have the not very exhilarating prospect of making concessions followed by concessions. Better make them gracefully or—better still—make them with enthusiasm. I tried to put the point, without offense, that he must not take away my cultivated accent but make arrangements for getting one himself (and my serious position is that we must compromise on the elimination of drawls and the maintenance of precisions and delicacies). Suddenly he said: 'Would you send your son to a public school?' I said I was ready to acquiesce in a great broadening of education

(a bit vague, I'm afraid), but that, as things are and not believing that to send my boy to the Council School would help his to Rugby, I would. I was human and wanted to give my children a good time. I could make them and myself miserable by a violent attempt to enter another social class, but till I could see that it would help somebody—and so on. 'A policy of graceful drifting,' he sneered, and I reminded him that I was not a politician. 'What are you, then?' he asked, and I explained that I was a mere literary gent. He lost interest in me a little when he heard I didn't write political leaders. Then: 'Look here,' he said, 'we may get to starvation point in this war. We may have to be rationed. Would you have the children of the rich fed on a better scale than those of the poor?' I said I would not. 'But in time of peace you would, and you'd have them warmer, better housed, clothed, educated. Where's your consistency? Where's your *noblesse oblige?* You are ready to fight and die with me now but why not then? It's only stupidity that makes the distinction. Are you ready to wage the bigger war after this war? And which side will you be on?'

"He had read his *Unto this Last,* he knew his Tolstoy—or some of him—and he told me he had had deep hesitations about enlisting. He had to examine his mind to see whether he had a conscientious objection to any war and nearly decided that he had. I told him that I had gone through very much the same phase and we warmed to one another. It struck me that we were very much alike. I suggested this to him

and he frowned and relented and—I think—rather liked it. On the whole I agreed to an accelerated rate of democratic progress, and fell back on my novels and plays as an apology for my existence. As to these he was curious and slightly contemptuous. 'We must have literature, of course,' he said. I understood that it would hardly be the sort that I was likely to produce.

"I confess he got the better of me. I don't think much of our bourgeois liberalism. I respect neither its formulas nor its practices. But, as I keep telling you, I'm not a politician and I can't stop to take up politics. (*Am* I boring you? Oh, Heavens! Am I boring you?)

"I hate the idea of being disloyal, even to a class. But how can one keep to one's class? Typical of it is my Uncle Reggie, whose object in life is to do the right things. I suppose he has some fundamental shrewdness that enabled him to make a bit of money in the shipping line. He appears to be always ticking things off as correct. If you've been to Windermere or to Paris he says: 'Where did you stay?' and if you mention the wrong hotel he's troubled. 'What school did you go to?' Rugby? Charterhouse? Quite correct. Where do you get your boots? He learnt with genuine distress that I didn't use trees. He aims at a sort of perfection. They needn't be perfect boots but they must come from the right shop. His boy was in the army, went out with the first batch and was killed quite correctly. Aunt Lizzie is bearing up wonderfully, and the poor old man never relaxes in

his war work—whatever it is—and is reassuringly conscious of just the right degree of wonderfulness too. Never anything is to be done that hasn't been done before, and we are to have a world of drilled patriots presently. Literature and the arts? It was time for them to be brought to heel. We were getting decadent, and they tell me Kipling's sales are not what they were. Poor old fellow! I can't help liking him, and I'm afraid I tolerate this sort of thing more than I ought to.

"And here, at last, I do come to a stop. Now to go and bully some of those privates. I *could* write a few more pages about Robert Turner's attitude towards the military machine. Rather good ones, but I spare you. He's been drafted off somewhere, by the bye, and we parted with a cordial handshake and a good look at one another.

"If I could only see you and know when I said the wrong things and when the right ones by those subtle little blinkings and shrinkings! And now I want to write something stupendously tender and, being a literary man, I see that literature's a failure. Imagine—imagine, Sibyl, what I would say! Even your imagination cannot overshoot the mark. (What a phrase!) I hope you're happy. Good-by, my dear."

CHAPTER XXII

MORE LETTERS

SIBYL replied:—

"Do you really fear to bore me? Sometimes I think of the long years—mayn't we hope for long years?—and my poor little tricks and accomplishments and wonder whether *you* will be tired of them some day. There are awful examples of beautiful people tiring of one another, aren't there? And how can we be safe? The more brilliant and passionate you are the sooner will it all fade. Are we brilliant and passionate? I can be as quiet as a mouse. I can—I think—be gently affectionate for a very long time—say for ever—and not bother you by flares of passion except now and then for a change. Perhaps I could do these when you weren't there. I could sing and wave my arms about and recite the tirades from my parts.

"Ah, my parts! I've a touchstone for them now. I say, 'That's true. To love is to be like that,' or 'No, I couldn't feel like that.' Before ever I saw you I used to say such things, but now I say them differently. I wonder if I'm really acting Juliet as beautifully as it feels. When Romeo isn't on the stage you are Romeo; when he is you are somehow mixed up

with Mr. Finnemore, who is pleasant and boyish and not very adequate. He thinks me awfully good, but then he thinks himself very good too. The other day I heard him say, 'By Jove!' under his breath when I had been, as he would say, coming it strong, and it gave me a thrill of pleasure. I like praise and applause, and the people who know to say I'm very good. The time when you gave me pure, unqualified pleasure was when you first gave me a line or two in the *Herald*. They were all curious to know what the *Herald* would say about me. The principles of *Herald* criticism seem to be a profound mystery to the profession. 'Y'never know where the silly devils will break out,' as an old actor said to me. They profess contempt for you, but they've an uneasy notion that you know something. I've felt that way myself.

"I say 'My only love sprung from my only hate,' and there seems a strange, awful appropriateness about it, though, as you know, I don't hate the English. I suppose I am as much English as German in my own self, in all the differences that make me a separate creature. I would grow more and more English and cleave to you, but this awful hatred of us stiffens me and angers me. I tell myself that it's natural, but, then, it is of an evil nature. I do try to be lofty and philosophic, but I'm afraid that—as *you* might say—it isn't my line of parts. I find myself imitating you, and even—do you detect it?—writing like you. I mean only a bit like you. Do you notice that I'm learning to make little parentheses,

but I stick to dashes generally because it would be slavish imitation to use brackets? I like ideas to pop up in the middle of a sentence the way you do it. Oh! I'm afraid I shall just imitate you and become a little, feminine you. So, as I don't like that, I must stick to my Germanism and quarrel with you sometimes. But it's the likes that quarrel so I mustn't. (Oh! Heavens! Am I boring you? Already?) Putting love and affection (and infatuation) on one side, have you any idea how much I admire you? (Come! He'll like that. I'm a cunning one.) (No more brackets.)

"I'm not sure that I want you to see me act the 'potion scene.' I don't know how to do it yet, and there are times when I feel myself just clattering along like anybody else. There, Geoffrey! Isn't that conceited? A lot of acting is just like that thing at a fair where you punch a sort of cushion, and the harder you punch the higher jumps a little rod. Poor me, who hasn't got a great punch like Mrs. Siddons, has to do some coaxing and subterfuging to make the rod move. I want to do things my own way, but when it says 'shriek' in the stage directions you can't very well whisper. 'Be not too tame neither,' and I'm trying to be awful and beautiful. Yes, but the great actors are that without trying. They learn their words and their business, and then they just come rushing along. If you see that I'm trying it won't do at all. I'm too intelligent, Geoffrey, but I shall make a good housewife. Don't write plays for me to act in; it would remind you of my limitations. Write splendid

plays and I'll act in them. I'll show you. I did astonish you once, didn't I?

"I ramble on and I wonder whether you'll like it. We're not just gushing lovers, are we? We shall incite and stimulate one another to terrific heights, and find we're exhausted and come toppling down. Do you fear that? If they are real heights it's not a bad way to die? And you aren't really dead at the bottom, but begin to crawl bravely up again. These are fears for quiet times. You and I will always be hungry for one another, always—at the best—snatching at moments, 'short leaves,' fragments, fragments.

"I feel that. I feel that intensely, Geoffrey, and so I say it. Thousands of girls are feeling it and I'm glad, I'm passionately glad, to be one with English girls and German girls. I'm not exactly superstitious, but it's no use pretending you don't feel things unlogically. Perhaps Juliet isn't good for me now. I seem to slip so easily into her forebodings. It's all calamity, calamity coming. But it has to be beautiful. We have to keep it beautiful. It's easy for me. The difficulties are for you, and that's well, for the strength is yours. It's easy to suffer at home. You'll say, generously, that I haven't a home. Well, then, it's easy to suffer.

"I think of you, and when I drink from the phial—I'm a realist and put some stuff in it that nips my throat—and cry 'Romeo, I come,' it's like an act of dedication. You are before me then and I'm losing you and all is dark and strange. The future is rushing on us and I could hear the guns in France—I think

of you as in France. I suppose I'm just using you for play-acting. Oughtn't I to do that? I couldn't help it. I couldn't possibly help it. Please take my acting seriously. Just now I must have it and it's part of you and me. It helps me and it takes me to you, and if I should tear myself away from it, I should have to think and think about I don't know what. Or ought I to become a nurse like Mary and that kind Miss Warde? Would English soldiers let me dress their wounds? How gladly I would do it!

"Mr. Finnemore is quite a handsome young man, Geoffrey. Would you like to play at being jealous? I can produce rather a nice vein of coquettishness and I'm sure he would respond. As it is I play the elder sister, and it's understood between us that he is very young. He's frightfully—unnecessarily—respectful, and it makes me feel too mature for Juliet. I suppose you critics say that Juliets are either crude or experienced, and that each is worse than the other. I shocked Mr. Finnemore very much by showing him a photograph of Madox Brown's 'Romeo and Juliet,' and asking him if we could get anything like that. He thought at first that I was joking, for Mrs. Madox Brown, who was the model for Juliet, was a rather stout and not very young lady. He likes things pretty, though he talks about passion. He didn't see much point about the Romeo's arm stretched out over the landscape and the Juliet's closed eyes.

"Yes, he is respectful and kind, and I think it is partly in pity. The murder is out. They all know that I am German, and the public will know it next

and hiss me. But all the actors are kind, or if they are not they do not obtrude. There will always be a world of artists for me. It is the artists who will save the world and keep it fresh and pure. We are a foolish, gadding, jealous lot, but our little sham world is more real than the big one of iron and brass and gold. Quite poetical I'm becoming, Geoffrey.

"I do like you to tell me about your young Socialist. Can't we reform the world by just being kind and decent to one another, instead of having to get to understand about economics and Acts of Parliament? It's so easy to be kind. That is—unless people are annoying. Or unless they bore you? Must I reply seriously to the question whether you bore me? Or whether anything you could say about my being a German girl could hurt me? Am I to consider whether you are a prig or likely to become a rotter or a coward? I suppose a bullet might hit you on the head and make you quite a different person. Let's wait till it happens. There's death, of course. But nothing can take from us what we've had. It's like climbing a mountain; you've always been on the top. I dare say this is illogical but it's conviction. You will always be very noble to me even if you do silly things sometimes. I won't be keeping you at it and nagging at you to live up to ideals. Don't be afraid of that. And don't think I'm always going to bother you with praises and incense. Just a little now while you are away.

"I saw that little Mr. Imalian the other day; indeed, I had tea with him at his invitation, and of

course it was at *the* tea-shop, as you call it. I'm glad you introduced him to me, for I find him such a refreshment after you Britishers. He knows how to care for things gently—not faintly but gently, and he knows what things are worth caring for. This learnedness about exquisite things is so rare and charming. He showed me some books he had been buying, and I liked to see him handle them. They weren't *very* good, he explained, and showed me little things about them that weren't quite right, but he treated them with such respect. I felt that I was away from the cruel war, and, as it were, in a peaceful garden. And that made me think of the war.

"I was conscious that Mr. Imalian felt us to be in a sort of defensive alliance. Being an Armenian, he is technically a Turkish subject, and is liable to ridiculous restrictions—as though an Armenian would side with a Turk! His smile, when he told me, was a revelation in irony which I was invited to share. Yes, I think if it were not for you he would be more explicit about the alliance. You are somehow involved with all these savages, though he does speak so nicely about you. Why should a civilized man become a soldier without compulsion? Yet I can imagine him glowing over his country's wrongs. A hint of them made it seem that to him they were the reality and this slaughter in Europe a foolish phantasmagoria. I can't quite see him away from a polite environment, but in some reincarnation he should return to the mysteries of the East. Am I conventional? Is it the true mystery to have him here?

"He is extraordinarily kind and not in the least in love with me unless it be as he loves his books and engravings. (Oh, dear! Is this conceit?) He offers to lend me precious books to mitigate, to decorate, theatrical lodgings, or he would supply me with books to read. He would get me German books from the Foreign Library if I liked, though to take out German books now is to put yourself under suspicion. The lady who gives out the books at this library is suffering, it seems, from her environment. The books are mainly French and German. The French are a gallant nation, certainly, but the morals in their books are deplorable, and the blameless lady is anxious to know which books are safe so that she may recommend them to the members. But the German books now are filled with unimaginable horrors, and so the poor woman sits all day surrounded by solid wickedness, shrinking and feeling as innocuous as she can. Mr. Imalian is funny about it, and says he sometimes accepts her recommendations, but the innocent French book is terribly innocent. The war leaves a few quiet places. Sometimes I feel that I'm in one when I talk to the people in our company. There's Mr. Emerson (Emerson!) who plays the County Paris, understudies Romeo, and watches Mr. Finnemore for incipient disease. He doesn't seem to have heard of the war. I suppose that, like a good many young men, he edges away from it nervously. He's immersed in his old interests and company gossip, and the war is just bad times. He talks to me about 'new readings' for the part of Romeo, and the way Forbes-Robertson used to

enter the tomb. You remember—don't you?—that little ragging play of yours about the Playhouse and the repertory theaters in which the prompter had lost his voice? It has come round to me that he thinks the joke was not in the best of taste; of course, he doesn't tell me so himself, because *that* would not be in the best of taste. He likes to talk to me about 'taste.' The other day there was an advertisement of *Macbeth* as 'the great Shakespearean play,' and he couldn't see that it was funny.

"Don't I write about trivialities? I clutch at them like a drowning man at straws. No, that's nonsense. There are big and terrible things about and I turn to the little. I sometimes envy you because you have to do just what you're told.

"It comes to me very strongly sometimes that I'm writing encouragements—or would if I could—to an English lover who is going out to fight my nation. Am I a sort of traitor? But I want us to be so good, so fine, so superfine. Superfine! Is that the danger? Am I just being foolish with my Idea? Is it an idea at all? There are times when it dies down to flatness and I'm miserable and crave excitement and despise it. But I mustn't end on this. My spirit is weak and I won't pretend that it isn't. I can always cheer up wonderfully. And I cheer up now at the notion of sending you chocolates and tobacco. Do not fear. I know the right kind of tobacco; I know that just any sort won't do, and I've got one of the paper covers put away. Isn't that nice and thoughtful of me?"

Mary wrote to him:—

"I cannot hold out against Sibyl. I am ashamed of my jealousies. And yet I cannot promise that they will not recur. It is old-fashioned, I suppose, to think of eradicating the evil from one's nature. Sometimes I feel poisoned, or poisonous, which is worse. I am all prides and exclusions and I go on pretending to be better than I am. You must pretend and pretend till that better becomes your true life. Just be yourself, the modern people say—but if you are full of evil! There is evil. It is nonsense to say there is no evil. The way is to imitate Christ. Humbly to imitate. That is not to lose your own soul but to find it. The Christ need not be exactly the Christ in the Bible or what you call the legendary Christ. You must make your own Christ, and so imitate what is within you. The Christ in the Bible is adorable, but there is not enough, and I feel that I must put other things in. To keep to what is written of Him may make one cold and narrow. It is a confused story, and it must become orderly in one's mind. As to what happened so long ago, I suppose I am as skeptical as you are.

"I knew that you would marry some day and that I should never marry. I don't know why, but I thought you would marry some one like Milly Warde. My thoughts were very indefinite, and I see now that they were very stupid. Milly is my friend, and lately I've been resenting the way you think of her. She is good, she is simply good. If she were a village

maiden carrying a pail of milk you would rave about her. Poor Milly! I think of all the Millys of the world and men like you passing them by to follow——

"Well, when Sibyl came I thought she was very clever and dangerous and seductive. It was childish, but I am childish, and I'm still Puritan, though I pretend to be emancipated. She puzzled me, but I knew I wasn't fair. She seemed to have all sorts of tricks and embroideries, and I was not generous enough to see that a love of beauty may be expressed in all manner of little ways. I was not generous enough to see that the shams and stains of the theater could not harm her.

"One person can never quite understand another, and it has been strange to me that she, a German woman, could agree calmly that you should go to fight against her nation. And yet there, again, my unfairness creeps in, for I want people not to be Germans and English, unless it be as they are dark or fair, but just human creatures helping one another. She glows at the idea of your going to this horrible slaughter, and it seems to me a twisted romance; it is the Old Testament, not the New. They say conscription will come, and I think that then there will be many to suffer for their conscience's sake. They will be to me the true successors of Hampden and Pym. At any rate when that time comes people who think like me will have to keep alive in the world something that your wars and your patriotism would sweep away. You have no room for it; you, or those whom you

serve, dare not let it modify by ever so little their blood and iron lest it should spread like a corruption. I write in pride and I would be humble. I do not know God's way. It may be that you are doing His work in the rough and that it can only be done that way.

"Sibyl is beautiful, and you deserve a beautiful love. It was base of me to think you might be content with something inferior, a compromise. No, it must be the great thing.

"I have given you nothing. I have been brooding at home, I have been exacting, I have been foolishly waiting. Yet at the back of everything we've been staunch friends, haven't we?

"There are times when Sibyl seems to me so charming and so strong in her fineness that I could hardly dare to love her. It is not at such times that I am jealous. She gives me extraordinary pleasure.

"I write of such things while the war goes thundering on outside. And here I am learning to be a nurse, and finding myself very clumsy. I try to be thorough and obedient, but I can't take to it naturally like Milly. You did know that she is here? She likes Sibyl so frankly and heartily! Must I confess that I think of a schoolgirl handling delicate china? I believe I could be rather good at malice."

CHAPTER XXIII

HONEYMOON

It was not ordained that Geoffrey should have his experience of the trenches as a private or even as a corporal. He was marked for promotion and felt that it would be affectation to refuse it. And so it came about that at the beginning of May, 1915, he was a second-lieutenant on leave, which was understood to be probably "last leave," when Sibyl and he set off on their honeymooning. Their wedding was of the least announced, most casual kind, but they rejected the aridness of the Registry Office, and made one of half a dozen couples at the Manchester Cathedral, overcoming the faint compunctions which the Church ritual stirred. "For folk like us," said Geoffrey, "a cathedral is grandiose, but for us it's a big occasion, and I wish St. Paul's had been handy." They liked their walk through the busy Manchester streets, with their secret of the tremendous occasion unguessed at by preoccupied citizens who glanced kindly at them. Sibyl learnt with approval that the Cathedral had been, in the affectionate remembrance of bygone inhabitants, the Old Church; the venerable and stable had a peculiar appeal on this morning of fluttering happiness and gathering apprehensions. Before they entered they turned to look at the miserable

façade of the railway station with its warning clock. Luggage reposed there ready for the northern flight, and prosaic circumstances became a dazzling aspect of romance.

Mary, nursing in a southern hospital, had telegraphed messages; Burke was on the high seas. Geoffrey had made no effort to collect his friends, and the day before had gone round to Attar, who agreed with alacrity to be best man. Two or three *Herald* men came in hastily while the ceremony was in process. Imalian, looking queerly decorous in a pew, contemplated them gravely, and Sibyl was vaguely aware of the Wibberleys and one or two other acquaintances. Attar tried to describe the perfunctoriness of the ceremony as a sketch in a tremendous frame. They were all friendly, but not very high-spirited. The little crowd drifted across the station with Sibyl and Geoffrey, and there was sandwich-eating at the buffet. Mr. Wibberley made a feeble proposal of champagne, but Sibyl demurred, and he was never sure that it would have been in the best taste. So some had coffee and some bitter beer, and cheerfulness was spasmodic. Attar said, in an aside, "The husk of ecstasy is no great matter." The other man said, "Yes, but it's all husk for us." They moved slowly towards the train. There was a despairing examination of "sevenpennys," and the hesitation between good things read and the wilderness of mediocrity. A joke about spy stories was considered by the Wibberleys in more than doubtful taste, though Sibyl had responded to it with a flash of gaiety. On the platform time went

slowly till a real joke gladdened the last minutes. Attar, intercepted by a carriage-cleaner, came to tell them that he had had an offer of second-hand confetti recently swept up after a genial occasion. The experienced eye had seen what the party lacked. "There will be no difficulty about the price," said Attar to Sibyl. "It is well within our means. You have only to say the word."

"I thought those things were a spontaneous joy offering," said Sibyl. "Are we to say whether the sun must shine on us or not?"

"It amounts to that," said Attar. "You are not in the grove. You want to do things your own way. You choose. It's difficult to modify an old ritual."

"We have acted pretty simply," said Sibyl with some disappointment.

"It has all been charming to-day," said Attar, and he was ready to tell a bigger lie than that. But the guard was whistling and everything became hurried and cordial. When Sibyl, after her wavings of farewell, sank back in the carriage she said: "And they're asking one another how he's going to get on with his German girl."

"We'll answer that presently," said Geoffrey. The present was good enough. The present was of enormous dimensions or—to look at it another way—it was a world of one entire and perfect chrysolite. They made a leisurely progress, putting up at an hotel on the skirts of the Lake country before penetrating to the recesses of the mountains. They thought they would stay there a few days, and though

they joked about them they took a childlike pleasure in the hotel luxuries. Sibyl had not tasted often of such things and was ready to enjoy them frankly. "It's nicer than theatrical lodgings," she said moderately, "and there's no sign of danger." They had actually discussed the possible dangers of their situation, which were, in brief, in the possibilities of contacts with fellow-guests. Geoffrey's khaki was a protection, of course, but was Sibyl ready to swear that nothing would ruffle her? "Ridiculous people stay at these places," said Geoffrey, and he suggested pleasantly that a St. Bartholomew massacre of the idle rich in the holiday resort hotels would, on the whole, be a benefit to the community. "A few decent people like ourselves would suffer, but think what a splendid clearance of sour, faded women!" Sibyl shuddered at the cruel pleasantry and warned him that men, too, grow old and useless. She questioned his assertion that these women had never been alive.

Their particular apprehension was that they might be drawn into Anglo-German discussion in which Sibyl could not be expected to shine. They made a compact to be very discreet and to take all humorously; even to delight in the excesses of ferocious patriotism. So they gave smiling assent—which tended to become the set grin—when naïve ladies vied with one another in assertions of the ruthless, they shook their heads over flickers of the window-blind that might be communications to England's enemies, they agreed that a shale tennis court might be a cover for a bed of concrete. They were two fond young people,

strangely insensible to these serious issues of the war and nods and winks soon put them—poor things—into their place as honeymooners. The only thing against them was the *Manchester Herald,* which Geoffrey received every morning, and, whether or not it was as bad as some reports indicated, it was certainly a "Radical rag"—as the gentlemen say—and very different from the *Morning Post.* These ladies clung to the *Morning Post,* and would not for worlds have been seen with any other journal. The *Times,* of course, was quite the right thing for the gentlemen, and it was sometimes whispered that the *Daily Telegraph* was a very comfortable paper and might be read at home; to be seen reading it here would be like being discovered with a bottle of gin. Literary the *Manchester Herald* might be, but what is literature at such a time? And this is no time to make too much of commerce—so long as one's dividends are paid regularly—and, besides, very good authority says that the *Herald's* commercial policy is now most unsound. However, perhaps the young soldier knew no better.

Sibyl and Geoffrey continued to smile assents, and Geoffrey found that his smile was sometimes intercepted by a companionable fellow whom he had met in the smoke-room. This Mr. Doveton had borrowed the *Herald,* and some guarded comment on it had led to conversation. He was not exactly a *Herald* man, though he remarked that certain organs of the Yellow Press appeared to be written by criminal lunatics for imbeciles. He thought the *Herald's* distinction be-

tween a military caste and the German nation could not be maintained, and Geoffrey interpreted this rather ingeniously as a point in favor of the military caste. To the suggestion that there must be a core of soundness he demurred. His theory was that Germany had many virtues, but no appreciable part with a balance of virtues. "I admire the Germans extremely," he said. "They've got ahead in the general application of intelligence—I wouldn't say intellectually—and they think they see their way to an efficient policing of the world. Economical efficiency follows and the humanities depend on this. I'm not speaking of military pundits, but of the intelligent classes. They're quite capable—many of them—of an ordered attempt to regenerate humanity. Of course, they must begin by being inhuman if that's the only way to get on top. Any sacrifice for logic! The bigger the better. What I blame them for is that they're not frank. A few *enfants terribles* of the Bernhardi type, perhaps, but they might make out a great case on pure efficiencies. The world is fighting for the old Liberal formula: Better govern yourselves ill than be governed well. Certainly there's no real fusion in Germany of the military, the commercial, and economic, and the humanitarian. They pretend it. The old illusion of the chosen race. It's stupid to regard the Kaiser as a hypocrite. He believes in God and himself. And of course we must beat them or forever hold our peace."

As to atrocities, Mr. Doveton shrugged his shoulders. "They've a severe theory of war," he said,

" which is founded on intellectual conviction. When you give license to your soldiers on theory they'll play the devil and all in practice. Must we infer the brutality of the race? Well, hardly, or but partly. In war the one side always exaggerates the atrocities of the other. Do we inquire into the morals of possible allies? We would accept help from any of these Balkan scoundrels. Don't let us be too self-righteous or we shall never find any one good enough to make peace with."

Geoffrey quoted a half-remembered story of some negotiator who failed to come to terms with the great Napoleon, because he insisted on the formal address: " usurper and enemy of the human race."

Doveton laughed approvingly, and appreciating an auditor who did not demand mere beatings of the patriotic drum, he continued: " The invasion of Belgium was bad, of course, but no treaty is ever maintained after the time to break it has come. This is a platitude, but once grant that Germany must go through Belgium or lose the war and ' scrap of paper ' is a reasonable description of the barrier. Germany's real offense was not in violating Belgium's neutrality, but in behaving like an arrogant brute in Belgium. One condemns all that, of course. We talk about Germany's confidence, and she is eternally boasting, but there's no such thing as confidence when you go to war. She is impelled to cruelty by fear. She is in terror of her life."

They were in the hotel lounge, and the time was late afternoon. A boy brought in evening papers

and Doveton unfolded one. His exclamation annoyed Geoffrey inexplicably; it revealed a disconcerting condition of nerves. "They've sunk the *Lusitania,*" said Doveton. He began to curse like any other man, his intellectual detachment abandoned. Indeed, it seemed that his half-cynical tolerations vexed him now. "I withdraw all I said in mitigation," he cried. "They're brutes, to be treated as brutes." The news was meager but definite. Geoffrey read it with a sinking heart. His commiseration was for Sibyl; he was to reflect presently that he had taken the calamity callously. As the two men stood together frowning and stiff, Sybil appeared.

She had a bowing acquaintance with Mr. Doveton, who handed her the paper, and with a gesture that seemed to renounce an unbearable world, withdrew. She read, and looked blankly at Geoffrey over the top of the paper, read again and laid it down.

"Perhaps it is not true," she said.

"Let us hope so."

"Geoffrey, do you feel any resentment towards me?"

"You?" he cried.

"That's what I think of first. It isn't all these poor people—children, babies. That's far away. I only feel it bluntly yet. It's you and me. Have we made an awful mistake? Are you thinking—she's a German? Because I am. It's my people who have done this. Tell me what you feel. No, don't come near me just yet."

"What I feel," he said, "is that this hurts you. I can hardly feel anything else."

"Oh, Geoffrey!" she said. "Is that true? Is it wrong of me, even now, to feel a little happiness? Just for a moment. No, don't kiss me—don't—it is wicked to be happy now. We are both thinking of ourselves when all this horror and misery has come."

"We feel together about it," he said. "There is no difference of feeling or opinion between us."

"Do you say that to test me?" she said.

"No." And then he added: "To reassure myself."

"Then there is a difference," she cried. "There is."

"I hope not, my dear."

"Geoffrey, I feel that this is a cruel and abominable deed—that nothing can justify it."

"I knew you would."

"And yet—it has been done. Do you want me to turn now, to renounce everything? To become English and hate the Germans?"

"You are English," he said.

"That's nonsense. Forgive me. We must be very careful with one another now. Geoffrey, all sorts of resentments are boiling in me. I'm afraid of your saying something that I might think not quite generous. You want me to say: They are all wicked. I've done with them. I cannot do that. I should just become a hypocrite. I'm casting round in my mind for excuses, for defenses. Yes, I mean excuses for slaughtering all these innocent people. Be generous to me, Geoffrey. I am in extreme need of it."

She sank into a cushioned seat. He sat beside her and she repulsed him gently. She was pale and quiet. She whispered: "Say some hard, clear things if you like."

She did not resist when he took her hand and he held it while he made his recital. "Granting," he said, "that the news is true and that Germany does not repudiate the act, what sort of defense could be set up? I dare say both sides quibble about international law. I can only look at the thing broadly. I think the Germans begin with the assumption that they must win. Our jingoes threaten them with national extinction if they don't. So anything becomes legitimate. Their war book maintains that true humanity may lie in ruthlessness, and it is a dictum of one of their chief military writers, that military action can only be barbarous when it is taken without a purpose. And, of course, Germany maintains that our blockade is a ruthless exercise of power without international sanction, so that we are attempting to starve the population. What is the difference, they'll say, between drowning people suddenly and starving them slowly? And when you begin to kill, what does it matter whom you kill? A soldier's life is not less precious than that of a woman or a child. As to the means, what paltry distinctions there are between poisoning with gas and blowing into fragments! You are permitted by civilization to do one and not the other. There's a novel by Disraeli in which his hero as a boy at school got the other boy down. The bystanders were horrified when he continued to pummel

him. 'What did I care for their silly rules of mock combat?' said the young Jew—I think he was a Jew. He had him and wasn't going to let him go. Chivalry is not for modern States."

It was a cold exposition and his grasp on her hand had slackened. She pulled her hand away, exclaiming: "You hate saying all this."

"My heart is not in it, certainly," he said; "it doesn't convince me."

"But—but," she said, "mayn't the German people —some of them, many of them—hate it and know they can't help it? If you—if the English—did equally terrible things would everybody here revolt?"

"I suppose they'd say the others did it first."

"This has come between us," she said.

"Don't say that, my dear."

"I know you have been very just and very generous too in all you've said. But I only know it coldly. You don't blame me, but you feel differently."

"I want you to think of this as a horrible crime," he said.

"I feel it so."

"And an awful stupidity."

"I dare say."

He shook her hand again. "We've had a great shock together and we've endured it," he said.

"Thank you, Geoffrey."

She said she would lie down a little before dinner and they parted tenderly.

The next day he smoked an after-breakfast ciga-

rette with Doveton, who had regained his philosophic bearing. They were digesting the morning confirmations of the disaster and their comments ran pretty well in unison. Sibyl entered suddenly and Geoffrey saw that she was agitated. She stopped, looking at Doveton, who rose, but she included both when she said: "They're turning those poor old people out."

"You mean——" but Geoffrey knew whom she meant.

Addressing Doveton, Sibyl said: "They're German, it seems. The old couple that sit at the little table by the window. I didn't know or I would have spoken to them. I did speak to them just now. The guests here have protested against their remaining. I heard the manager tell them, and the old man was so gentle and polite. His wife took his arm, and they stood there before that manager, who thought he was being tactful. I spoke to them in German, and it was quite startling and pathetic. Geoffrey, I cannot bear it. I cannot keep to the agreement."

"My wife is German," said Geoffrey.

"Oh, thank you, Geoffrey! That's beautiful of you."

Doveton was mystified, but vaguely sympathetic. He murmured something about not having the least idea, hesitating over his line. "They looked harmless enough," he said, trying to turn the awkward corner.

"What is so amazing to me," said Sibyl, frankly including Doveton, "is that these people who have

been so cruel to an innocent old man and woman are now making their plans for a pleasant day."

"The sense of duty done," said Doveton, coming down on Sibyl's side of the fence.

"I've wondered sometimes," Sibyl continued, "whether there's anything more merciless than the English of the comfortable class. Forgive me, Geoffrey. Perhaps they are just, but they do not enter into the feelings of others. You see it with their servants and even with their children. They may say kind things but they are implacable."

"A strong sense of order," said Doveton. He was finding the position interesting.

"Think of those old Germans packing now upstairs. Think of the old lady folding her dresses hastily."

"We mustn't be too sentimental," said Doveton. "We've other things to thinks about."

"You mean the *Lusitania?*" said Sibyl. "If they were passionate I might forgive them. They are only spiteful. And to me this is a far greater calamity than to you. If this were a duty that hurt, I could respect them. But we mustn't bore Mr. Doveton. What now, Geoffrey?"

"Well, I suppose we'd better be going," he said.

"Oh, but is that necessary?" said Doveton. "If nobody knows—I mean there couldn't be any objection —I'm sure Madam would not speak so freely to others as—very much honored and sympathize in—difficult position."

"I don't insist on a melodramatic exit," Sibyl said

to Geoffrey, "but you will say why we're going, won't you?"

"Dash it all!" said Geoffrey, grinning ruefully, "and here's this fellow coming."

The suave manager, recipient of congratulations and ready for more, paused as Geoffrey indicated that he wished to speak to him. Full of his subject, he said: "They will be gone in half an hour. Quite quietly."

"No bloodshed?" said Sibyl, and the idea of those gentle old people putting up a fight had its humor. The manager looked at her doubtfully. This was the lady who had spoken to them impulsively, and it appeared in their own language.

"We are obliged to be very particular," he said.

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "and we must do our best to help you. My wife is German and decides that as her compatriots are turned out she cannot stay here. Please prepare our bill and let us have a carriage in"—he consulted his watch and Sibyl's eye—"an hour. Say, half-past eleven."

The manager hesitated, rubbing his chin, and losing something of his grace of demeanor. "Do people know?" he said bluntly.

"Know what?" said Geoffrey.

"About the lady."

"You may inform them as soon as you please," said Geoffrey.

But that, of course, was not at all what he meant. Taking in Doveton as a friend of the party he sug-

gested that there was no need to let it out. He murmured something about British officer—shouldn't dream of interfering—his directors—difficult position.

"At half-past eleven, then," said Geoffrey.

Doveton said: "You might let me have my bill immediately after lunch. There's a coach about half-past two, I think?"

The manager looked from one to another and withdrew muttering. Sibyl bowed to Doveton and went to her room. Geoffrey said: "Look here! Your going has nothing to do with us?"

Doveton considered. "It was an impulse," he said. "Mind you, I don't find the action of these people so unnatural. This *Lusitania* affair calls for protest. Unphilosophic if you like. You know what people are."

"Then why do you go?"

He considered again. "Frankly," he said, "I think it was an instinctive tribute to your wife. I'm ready to hang the whole German nation this morning. She's another matter."

"I can hardly thank you," said Geoffrey, "for I think she would resent your attitude."

"It isn't an attitude," said Doveton. "That's exactly what it isn't."

"Well, well!" said Geoffrey. "I hope we may meet in happier times. But go and make peace with your friend the manager."

"Ah!" said Doveton. "Tell your wife that I'm going because I can't stand the slippery devil."

A little later Sibyl whispered to Geoffrey: "No tips."

"Why?" he said.

"They refused them from the Germans. I think the manager told them."

And so several deserving menials stared blankly after the officer and his wife who had so strangely neglected the usages of civilized society.

They drove away with their modest luggage, determined to avoid hotels, and a puzzled driver changed directions according to their fancy. It became necessary to bait and lunch, and presently they set off again. He pulled up at last and asked them where they were going. There was veiled menace in his voice, for the poor man was conscious of lengthening distances, a mounting bill, and some lack of sanity in his fares. "What place is this?" cried Sibyl, and it appeared that it was Skelwith Bridge. "Drive over the bridge," she said, and they crossed the rushing, foaming stream. They stopped again, and the man said it was a big hill into Little Langdale. But Sibyl descended, walked a few yards forward to a cottage, and in an incredibly short time emerged crying, "Here!"

And here it was. They found quiet, friendly folk to whom the war was but a distant alarm; they lived simply, climbing the fells, bathing in the river, watching the clouds. The country sights and sounds and smells were welcome and sufficient. They had peace and an intimate affection. Nothing disturbed them but the flight of time. They were conscious of the inexorable, but they were happy.

CHAPTER XXIV

"FROM THE TRENCHES"

From France Geoffrey wrote to Sibyl:—

"I'm one of those who liked to keep their desks tidy, and have some sort of program for the day and the week. And so one of the things that oppresses my spirit is the monstrous confusion of this life. We are more settled than we were, but we are not settled at all. The definite commands, the clicking of all sorts of machinery, give an illusion of order, but there are times when it seems that there is no order; that all is lapses and omissions, waste and repetition. I can see that it must be so, that war and parade are two different things. And this illusion or pretense of orderliness somewhere is necessary for our sanity. I must not give you details, but everything done here is like gathering a handful and letting most of it slip through your fingers. I am trying my best to be a good officer, and I don't think I am worse than most, but I'm fearfully conscious of being untried, of giving orders with a lack of conviction, or insisting on useless performances. I want to have human relations with the men under me, but I'm so afraid of letting down discipline that I hardly dare experiment in the affabilities—to say nothing of the humanities. I've tried the paternal sometimes

—borrowing the idea from the Russians in Tolstoy's war stories—but it doesn't quite come off. Perhaps this is because I do it nervously. It's like trying to be literary, trying to be the artist.

"There are fashions in this war and it's a good one for the officer to admire his men. I follow it, of course, but being a bit superfine and superior, I do it with a difference. All my life I've been trying to join in the chorus and then breaking out into some discordance of my own. And here, at the heart of reality, one is haunted by *clichés;* we are all saying the same resounding things, but we get them out of the newspapers. Have you noticed that when a man comes back from the war he quotes the newspaper to you? He has a precious experience of his own, but he makes it like the newspapers. Ah! the newspapers! They run the war, and the history of it will never be disentangled from their plausibilities. Few, indeed, of these correspondents are strong enough to see events with their own eyes. I'm not in the middle of it yet, but I've seen enough to shake my faith in history. Less and less do I believe in it. A strong man makes history? A strong writer might. Even our attitude towards the Germans is derived from the newspapers.

"Naturally, my dear, you will take all this with a grain of salt. So much depends on one's mood, and I can veer from the sentimental to the savagely cynical. My men—some of them—are dirty brutes and they are potential heroes. Any one of them may turn out a better man than I. This is a great school

of humility or, at any rate, of proportion. I think the man I shall dislike the most is the hard, fearless hero. Confound him! I shall want to line up to him with quite the wrong sort of temperament. *Shan't* I be down on the men who expose themselves unnecessarily?

"But at present we're none of us heroes. We hear guns going off in the distance and wonder whether we shall wobble when our turn comes. There's a difference between the men who have taken the plunge and those on the brink, though we pretend to ignore it. I amuse myself sometimes by trying to distinguish between those who have and those who haven't, and though I'm often wrong, the difference is there. Do I dwell on the point morbidly? Do you fear that I may be one of the unhappy ones who cannot face it? Don't fear. I shall try so uncommonly hard."

Again he wrote:—

"Sibyl, I'm in a curious state of exaltation and horror; I hardly know which predominates. I've got the plunge over, and it's an enormous relief, but the blood and violence sicken me. I turn to you, I must write to you. I am all raw and (metaphorically) bleeding. I've crossed an abyss and it separates me from you, but in spirit (in spirit, Sibyl) I must come to you. I want to be comforted and healed, and I dare say I'm selfish, but yet I know that in appealing to you, I make everything between us stronger and finer. I'm not whining, I've not lost control (thank

Heaven!), but I feel that if I'm not frank now I never shall be. And yet I don't know that I've much to say. I seem to want to convey to you pure emotion rather than experiences. I'm frightfully alone (every man is), and I fight against that terrible idea that we must be alone. You are infinitely helpful and comforting.

"You realize now, don't you, that there's the ordinary chance of my being killed or wounded any day? I want to say it, though it's not necessary, because we want frankness. I shall let you know my movements as well as I can so that you may sometimes be relatively at ease. I think this way is best for us. I talked the other night to a boy here who told me he had promised his mother to let her know all he could of the dangers of his movements. He said they had 'decided it was best.' Perhaps the mother would concentrate in prayer. I feel some softening of my heart (not of my brain) towards prayer. Ah! But think of the mother who does not pray and yet would know when her boys go to battle! What noble things this war has brought to us! I hasten, as a good citizen of the world, to say that it's damnable on balance.

"We were rushed up unexpectedly to the trenches. There was no gradual initiation in safe places for us. We had heard a vast cannonade, and as we marched up in the twilight we met a lot of stragglers, stretcher-bearers with wounded, walking cases, and some that were not wounded. It seemed an appalling muddle, but there was some reassurance in our marching stiffly

together. I think I was rather nervously emphatic about trifles such as dressing the line, feeling that everything depended on precision, and that these poor devils who were running away must be taught a lesson by the novices. Crowding up the communication trenches shattered this notion of one irresistible force —it was never very strong, perhaps—and the sensations of confusion, aimlessness, and danger were almost overwhelming. But there was growing in me a hope that might swell into confidence; I was shaky, but I was not going to lose control; I had moments of pure funk, but I overcame them. I began to realize that it *could be done.* There in that slushy, dark communication trench, when we paused to let the congestion in front of us remove itself, I had a moment of self-communion that is a high-water mark in my poor life. I was to pass through many phases of discouragement during the next few hours, but there for the moment I did rise above my circumstances. I was calm and I was romantic. I was no end of a fine fellow and, figuratively, shook hands with myself. And quite gaily—yes, gaily, Sibyl—I kissed my hand to you.

"Splendid, wasn't it? I came back to the real thing when we moved on again, but I was the better, I think, for that bit of masquerading. I got good control of my voice, which I'd been rather afraid to use, and was pleased to be able to pitch it low with authority; I think it heartened the men. But stumbling along that plashy trench was poor fun.

"We held the front trench till morning—and when

I say that I'm speaking conventionally, for there wasn't really the sensation of holding anything. We cowered in a deep, dirty ditch, and wondered what was going to happen next. Death, we imagined, was just round the corner, and the bolder spirits among the men did some rather strained joking on the subject. It was chilly, but not really cold, and as nothing happened we gained a little confidence. I couldn't recapture my moment of bravado, and I tried the line of emotional comradeship; I tried to think of these fellows as brothers in a great quest. It wasn't very successful, but you must occupy your mind somehow, and I'm learning that the mind is a recalcitrant member that has to obey the will. I suppose it was stupid of me to try to sentimentalize at such a moment, but I think I wanted something human and decent to die on if death was coming. At first I suppose one thinks too much of the danger of death, and then, perhaps, too little. I'll be canny on your account if not on my own. Well, I found that fancies and niceties wouldn't do, and that the higher emotions are for quiet times. The only thing is to hold on—to say 'I will' or 'I will not,' as the case may be. That's all you can do.

"In the gray of the dawn both sides began with their guns again, and it was all I could do to bear it. The noise! I, who used to spin round and curse when a whistle went off in a railway station! The noise is the worst thing in war. Or is it the smells? Or the cold? I'm not going to spare you and pretend that I like it. That morning I had an ugly glimpse

of nervous collapse. I knew I mustn't, I thought I knew I wouldn't, but how could I know? This holding on is the greatest thing in life. So it seemed and so it seems. It was the only thing that mattered. What amazing creatures we are! I was just managing not to make a fool of myself and it was the extreme of heroism—morally I felt that I was a great hero. But the others were doing the same. Could they possibly have felt the noise and terror as I did? I was doing it all, so to speak, on my *noblesse oblige,* but I wasn't any better than the others. There were a few exceptions. Cowardice is like sea-sickness and you mustn't encourage it. There was one poor boy who was sobbing and I kicked him. I wasn't exactly angry with him, and I think it was a sort of attempt at reasonable action. I kicked him pretty hard, but I spoke jocularly. He said, 'All right, sir,' in a frightened way and he pulled himself together fairly well. The wonderful thing is that it was fairly well. You may get to the bottom, or you may recover and reach the top, but to go on striving and holding your own on the inclined plane is the real heroism. I could have cried over this lad. I watched him and gave him some encouragement. I wanted to apologize for kicking him, but I thought I mustn't. He was rather dog-like and bore no malice. I'm afraid he was killed; we lost him.

"This failure of nerve is an awful, permeating disease which takes many forms. Lots of fine soldiers are at home with it, and there is an amiable conspiracy to call it by some harmless name. Here

a brutal frankness prevails, and nothing is more difficult than to shirk with credit. Men do stupid, rash things because they're afraid of cynical comment—or afraid of themselves. There's a great deal of charity to a genuine breakdown; it's what might happen to any of us. There was an awful scene the other day with a young subaltern, and yet I had it from those who know him that he had behaved magnificently a few days before.

"Why do I harp on this sort of thing to you? My sympathies run strongly to the moral, mental struggle. I think I'm through the worst of this phase of it myself, and I can take a sort of beneficent, understanding attitude to others. But who knows what's to come?

"I evade the point. The Germans attacked at dawn and got into our trenches. I'm not going to describe this minutely. For one thing, I can't; for another, I don't want to. I can't because it was all such an extraordinary confusion, and because I can't remember the order of things. The incredible (and expected) happened, and we had the fellows tumbling down on to us. Poor devils! Sweaty brutes! It's strange—that physical contact with a man you're trying to kill. Glimpses, touches, are vivid beyond belief. It was ugly, horrible. It transcended all of ugly or horrible I could have conceived. And yet I was not a mere ravening beast. Don't think that. Perhaps I didn't get to the true fighting madness, but I had a bit of sanity left. I had even the ghost of compunction mixed up with evil passions. At the worst I could

have responded to an appeal of reason. I think so. I was horribly frightened, and yet, I suppose, I was brave rather than otherwise. I laid about me. Ah! No details. One has to face things and to tuck them away. Horror and exaltation! I think of you now. I try in a futile way to exalt the experience. I've a craving for the spiritual, for something mystical or quietist or even strenuous. I want to purify myself for you. Without you I'm lost. Somebody to believe in me, to pity me—love me. But I must keep myself in hand. In this life you must always be ready to turn on stoicism. Don't think I'm just raving with emotion. I'm aiming at the truth.

"The poor devils who got to us were killed or wounded—perhaps one or two were captured, but it's hard for a man in your trench to persuade you he's harmless—and presently we had to counter-attack. To go over the top for the first time is the strangest sensation. You have just a lurking hope that nobody will see you and that nothing will happen, and then you see men falling and you experience the most awful loneliness. I've heard a man put it that 'you feel there's nobody between you and God'; it's a kind of nakedness. In the trenches, even when the shells are thickest, you cling to the idea of safety, but outside you're the sport of malignant fireworks. You advance but you don't know where you're going or why or what comes next. As an officer you must act confidently, but you are not sure of anything. There is nothing stable or fixed in the world, and even the men whom you know intimately have be-

come strangers to you; their expressions are so different that they are hardly recognizable. Those that can do it speak to one another with a kind of hectic jocosity; when things are at the worst, or nearly at the worst, you retain your consciousness as a social being who has presently to put a face on things. And you can still wonder whether a nice little bone-splintering wound may presently stretch you on an ambulance bound for home, or whether it will be a thud on the head and blackness evermore. You mustn't think too much of that nice little wound; it's demoralizing and unsportmanlike. As to whether it's good to try to face the idea of death or to put it away from you, I'm in two minds. Perhaps this doesn't matter, for these things decide themselves. A man here—one of my fellow-officers—put a strange question to me lately. He asked whether I felt that the effects of high explosive shattered the idea of an after life. The point wasn't arguable, of course, and it was queer to find him suggesting the innate, the deeply instinctive as ground for *dis*belief. He had got the notion from a book he had been reading and he couldn't get away from it. We talked about immortality and really, you know, it's an interesting question for men in our position. Immortality! Is belief in it 'the last infirmity of noble mind'? The spirit here seems too fragile to count much. I am *brutal* with you—in the French sense. What I feel —queerly—is that I don't want the idea of immortality to go out of the world altogether. Let us keep a few childish, credulous people to maintain the idea.

How frank one can become! Ultra-frank? Fancifully frank?

"This counter-attack. What happened? I'm not very clear. We got somewhere—for anything I know it may have been the German trenches—but it wasn't tenable and we came back. We didn't run away, but we came back. I see that I must strive to keep a clearer notion of what's going on if I'm to be a good officer. It was all distractions and holding oneself together, and I don't know what happened. It's pardonable, and I think I didn't do badly for a first time. I've lost the sense of fighting a machine, and I can conceive Germans as gasping inefficients, poor devils who would rather be at home. I shall have my terrors and alarms, but I feel so much better now that I know—what? That I'm not the exceptional coward. Do you want me to be the exceptional hero? I like the idea of just doing a good, honest share.

"Yes, that desire for comfort in an ambulance is despicable, but we all have times when the one wish is that this cup should pass. We all sentimentalize a bit, and feel like writing rhetorical letters home. We all think of days in the country, and of our stupidity in having omitted to be happy when we could. Ah! But I've something to remember, I've not missed the best of life. One has glimpses, reminders, even here that bring back Skelwith Bridge with its quiet fields and the cows, and even the hens. You remember the evening when we stood on Little Loughrigg and watched the clouds drift away from Bow

Fell. The beautiful lines and the peak came out, and you spoke of the accident of beauty, and how rough, chance groupings of rock became exquisite form when you look at them from far away. And as to this accident, this irrelevance of beauty, I said it was the same with a woman's face, and that you really hadn't any moral right to be as beautiful as you are. (I withdraw. I never believed that. You were lucky in the original structure, I dare say, but you've lived your life into your face. I see that more and more.) And you in your modesty turned to the mountains again and said that there were no ugly ones, and that blunt old Wetherlam—that aged mountain—was almost as beautiful as Bow Fell. But Bow Fell became our symbol of the eternal, the impregnable, the beautiful. When the Romans were at Hard Knott they watched the mists clear from its top just as we did, and as those who come thousands of years after us will. Permit me a little of the wider platitude. There are times when one wants to feel small.

" I'm an incurable skeptic, a doubter, and sometimes I wonder whether I'm missing the mark awfully with you. When you are there I can see faintest indications and we play upon one another subtly (don't we?), but now my thoughts go on unchecked. Should I have been more reticent? Do I ask too much of you? And do I analyze and expose myself too much? Is it undignified and wearisome? Fancy an awful refinement of *The Egoist* in which Sir Willoughby is a modest gentleman to the world and concentrates on the unfortunate one. A refinement! What cheek!

Poor Clara! Poor Sibyl! Is it possible to explain until there's no mystery? Why! I love you for your mystery. You can only love a mystery. You can't love anything you thoroughly understand.

"Could you send me a pocket-handkerchief now and then? The wash is not very regular. I'm getting to see that, up to a point, dirt doesn't matter. We've been pedantic about dirt and permitted idle exquisites to set the fashion instead of the men who go to darkest Africa and the North Pole. But will this war abolish the picnic?

"Oh! And thank you for sending me my old *Golden Treasury*. Yes, I find I can read it even here. Read it! I cling to it. It's a symbol of what I'm ready to die for. I learn the Shakespeare sonnets in it by heart and repeat them to myself in queer conditions. I feel sometimes that I can't do justice to the new poets now—the 'Georgians' and people. I've got my fill from the old ones. I'm struck by something and then I can't remember it, or whether it's by Gordon Bottomley or Wilfred Wilson Gibson. It's not fair. But I read the old familiar things again and again. Do you know Hood's—

> "'I remember, I remember,
> The house where I was born'?

I con it over now with deep emotion. Such simple, exquisite old things are more to me than ever. And I've been reading 'The Affliction of Margaret,' and it's still greatly tragic. It isn't less tragic because mil-

lions are being killed, or even because while I read I can hear bullets hitting the sandbags. They talk about a new literature after the war. It's nonsense. These things are as steadfast as the stars, and they are the heart of the England I am fighting for."

Sibyl replied to him:—

"I can bear anything you tell me. I read your letter and thought I couldn't. I thought I would write and ask you to stop, to deceive me, to pretend it's not so bad. I say I thought it, but I didn't exactly think it. I must have known all the time that I couldn't write that. And all the time I did feel that I must know everything, that if you once began to deceive me I should know no rest. Yes, I know that you may be killed any day. I think the news would hardly startle me. It would take its place in my thoughts. I am not trembling when the postman comes, and looking for telegraph boys. I seem to be listening for something farther away than that. I have happy times. At least they're very like happiness. I feel—is this strange or affected?—that you and I have accomplished something prodigious. It's like having won something that can't be taken away.

"I mustn't go on like this. I'm minded to go to the other extreme and be an ordinary, spiteful German girl. (Does anybody look at your letters, and will they put me in prison?)

"Well, I get a little tired of your patriot here. He always wants to go one better, as the saying is. If

you would shoot a German, he would hang; if you would impeach Haldane, he would follow with Asquith and Grey. I think I might manage to get nicely bored by him; it's so stupid, if you *are* at war with cannibals, to be always denouncing cannibalism. Ah! these Germans! Geoffrey, I think of arguments. Is it against our compact? Is it being false to the Idea? Forgive me. I must be just to my poor country too. For I feel all this power that is being brought against it. I don't think all the time of you. Think of the Germans with a great army on each side and Great Britain on the sea! There are some dreadful arguments about what your side does, but you can't get at the truth by arguing; you can only settle yourself in a position. The German case is that they must win. Would you, at the last resort, break the rules rather than lose? Then why not begin by breaking them? Am I depraved? I try to think. Geoffrey, we are in desperate straits. You boast that you will utterly destroy us. Starve us. To crush a great country is not right. And so we take *any* means. Do you say it's all *us?* But I can't feel that, and millions and millions of Germans can't. I try to think beyond my feelings. I want peace and quietness. I am not evil. I can be gentle and loving. I wish this hadn't come. You are nobler and clearer than I. Yes, I can feel spite in me. Geoffrey, *can* you keep back millions of people by writing something on a scrap of paper? Oh! Am I depraved? Isn't it a nonsensical distinction between high explosives and gas? If the Hague Conference made it, wasn't that silly?

Did we agree? I suppose we *are* ruthless. Do you think better of the nations that are pitiably soft?

"I'm letting you see the worst of me. Am I being false to the Idea? That old Idea! And to write to you like this when you——

"There are times when I feel thoroughly German and bad—in your eyes. But I do try. And if they wouldn't vex me so I should love and admire the English. I do. So often I feel that you are not guided by self-interest. There! Is that a nice concession, Geoffrey? It's not all anger and spite against us; there's indignation and resentment. There! I suppose if I lived among the Germans I might be hating them as well as loving. There is no place for me. And Germans here are changing their names and trying to range themselves. They denounce German misdeeds publicly, and they send their sons to the slaughter, pathetically out-Britishing the British. I will not do that. I should like to return to my old German name, but I am not foolish and would not make it difficult for you.

"I see the English boys go off to fight and I could love them for it. This readiness of sacrifice because it's right. Good form, says the cynic. Well, good form. It's magnificent. How great the world is showing itself! There are so many things that we should not have known. In these gallant boys I see something of you. Their fearlessness is so splendid, as yours would be seen from outside. I know something of the inside, and that makes it beautiful and pathetic. I know you always think of me, and I do appreciate

your trusting me. Tell me the best and the worst. I tell you the worst. I could cross out some that I have written, but it's part of my life, of me, and I mustn't shirk it.

"I think of you and me as great lovers, like the famous ones of the world, like Romeo and Juliet, or Laura and Petrarch, or—what are the others? I don't want fame—not publicity—but isn't it all very wonderful? It excites me to think how nobly romantic we are. We are showing what love can do.

"I'm not being absurd, Geoffrey, I hope. We mustn't be too noble. Not like chilly statues. I can fancy nobleness growing on you till there was nothing warm or comfortable anywhere. Don't let's be great marble prigs incapable of annoyance. You may show a little spite, as I do.

"Yes, I do not forget Bow Fell. We'll see it again, we'll climb it again. I don't think, really, it's less mysterious to me because I've seen it close. Don't fear that I shall understand you too much. Why! I adore you. All the time I'm arguing I adore you. My letters would be just repetitions of that if I let them. I'm not so foolish. But I've got a tight hold on you."

Geoffrey wrote to Mary. He was moved to write about the bayonet charge, to grasp his nettle effectually. If you cannot justify the hand-to-hand fighting, you cannot justify war. He tried to reason about this descent into hell. "It is a hell in which you cannot merely endure but must work with the instruments

of hell. These are not the innocent iron, the chemical reactions that spread death abroad, but our own passions. You must kill passionately and brutally, and then return to sanity. Your spirit is bruised and humbled, and you have a black remembrance. For duty, for your belief in an ultimate justice, you must submit to that. You must be ready not only to die but to kill. To kill will degrade me? Then I must be degraded."

He continued: "There is a weight on my spirits all the time. A dead weight. I suppose we are all so. I wake in the morning to remember it. Sometimes there is a kind of champagne gaiety, a flare in the dark, a moment of exaltation, but all the time I am deeply conscious of this awful oppression of the spirit. I suppose it means that I haven't conquered myself, that I can't. I shall go on behaving all right, but I cannot get control as I would. I am the Unhappy Warrior.

"I write this to you. I must tell some one. Do not repeat it to Sibyl. I am not secret and disloyal, but with her I must aspire. I can tell her terrible things, but not this. And you are a part of me. Perhaps this will pass."

Sibyl wrote to Geoffrey:—

"I saw Mary the other day, and she was very good to me. She let out that she had heard from you, but she didn't show me the letter. Why should she? I don't show her mine. And yet I wanted to see that

letter. I couldn't quite understand her. Was she exalted? Was she depressed? What did you say to her? It had to do with you. Geoffrey, there is a sort of jealousy between us yet. She was kind enough. You didn't write anything to her that I was not to know? Would that be fair? But, oh! do give her anything that would make her happy. I tell you everything."

Geoffrey replied to this:—

"I did say something to her—to her alone. It seemed at the time to be something between her and me. Is that wrong? I say a thousand things to you that are for you alone."

Sibyl wrote in generous acquiescence.

CHAPTER XXV

LAST LETTERS

It was more than a year later that Geoffrey wrote:—

"I'm yet in hopes that I may get another leave before our child is born. Or soon after? Would that be better? I shouldn't like leaving you just before the event. The awful thing about leave is its definiteness; you are always conscious that the sands are running out. I've specialized in that sort of consciousness. It used to spoil my holidays.

"What you say about the persecutions (I'll call them that) to which you are subjected is immensely disturbing to me. Of course they must intern dangerous Germans, or those who might be dangerous. I can conceive circumstances in which you and I might acquiesce in your internment. It would be ridiculous, certainly, but, after all, you are a German, aren't you, and you have sympathies which they might fear could be translated into action. (By the bye, I can write freely as I'm censoring my own letters.) But this mean spite, this pseudo-indignation with innocent people is maddening. What horrifies me is this breakdown of Christianity (I find myself becoming a sort of Christian,) this revelation of ungenerousness. It has nothing to do with efficiency in the war, and the proportion of moral indignation is a grain to the ton.

"I've some leisure now and then, and I've been reading a book by a Frenchman named Gaston Riou. He was a Red Cross orderly, good enough to be mentioned in despatches, and he was wounded and taken as a prisoner to Germany. There is some magnanimity left in the world. Riou was badly treated—not, perhaps, with positive malignity, but with the stupid severity that is almost as bad—and he maintains a philosophic detachment. He can appreciate German ideals and see the good in individual Germans. He is not sentimental at all, he never acquiesces in injustice, he remains alert, even gay, helpful to his comrades. Ah, these gallant French! It's a pride to be with them. I think you are half French.

"Gaston Riou is alive still, I hope, but there's an awful spiritual waste going on. In Germany, too, I'm sure. I remember, in the old days, at that little cellar of a tea-shop, how we used to talk about the artist and whether he was to be kept out of danger. Would you let a young Shakespeare go to the war if you knew it? So much the less Shakespeare he if he claimed privilege. Fancy a tribunal deciding which of the poets were good enough for exemption! The artist is a man among men and he has shown himself so. If my poor little plays and novels were a thousand times better than they are, I couldn't shelter behind them.

"There's a spiritual waste, but there's rebirth too. Men like Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell and Dixon Scott, lost in the war, are shining lights to us. I've not won the V.C. or even the D.S.O., but I've

always got it in my mind that I must 'draw the breath of finer air,' as Meredith says. I suppose I'm not the kind for rash heroics, but I must take a reasonable turn and hold up my head with the rest. Ah! but I wish I could be rid of this soldiering. It's not a natural life. I look back on the old days of the *Herald* as happiness—yes, and usefulness. More and more I believe in the reason and generosity it represents. I am passionately for it and for my comrades there. I want peace—peace in my heart, peace with our foes, but I want a passionate life, too. I'm prone to sink back in mental and bodily indolence and you'll have to prod me on. The subtleties of indolence are incalculable. I think some of the conscientious objectors have drifted into their position through a sort of indolence, an initial timidity. Others, of course, are just the most pugnacious of mankind. I think there are some simple and beautiful sincerities among them. The other day there was a case reported of a man who affirmed that he had put the case before Christ, that he had Christ's support; the people on the tribunal thought him insane. And that man Arnold Grey, who has become a 'case'—I knew him, I talked to him, and his punishment revolts me. When you don't agree with a man you think that somewhere far back in his consciousness there must be a sort of moral kink. It can never be straightened out, but all manner of sincerities and nobilities may come on top of it. I didn't quite like Grey, but I can't help feeling that he has become tougher and finer; if he became base or cowardly we should cease to punish him.

"Yes, this question of Christianity becomes an obsession to me. Christianity is on its trial. I shouldn't say that it is failing, but the Christians are failing. They are not making a decent compromise. They seem to think that Christ would have made an exception in disfavor of the Germans. A simple Christian would see that it is the very case he had in mind. When he said, 'Forgive your enemies,' if he didn't mean the Germans he meant nothing. Christ would not be in favor of a commercial boycott. He could not make much of a Christian Church become a vast organization, all machinery and salaries and positions and vain repetitions with a few fine people wandering in the maze.

"I think it's common sense that we cannot turn the other cheek to Germany. We must be, in a sense, ruthless in carrying on the war. But we must carry peace in our hearts and love for all that's lovable. To suppose that there is nothing fine and lovable in Germany is foolishnes. We are not to remember that till after the war? I believe in the truth. It does not need a lie to make me do my best here. But the millions on whom we depend will only carry on the war if they believe the lie? And so we others must pretend to believe it? Have we come to that?

"I read another book—by an American, I think, who called the German fighting machine the most pitiful and devitalized thing that ever ran up and down the earth. You cannot be chivalrous to a crashing machine, but you can be pitiful to a mad dog. It is deeply pathetic. When it attacks you, you try to

batter out its brains, but you don't let it change you into a mad dog. There is much at the door of the human race. Our self-righteousness must accept that. These German excesses humiliate us. They are what we are capable of; what, at the worst, we are guilty of. Forgive me if I say that we are better than they, and that the difference is worth dying for.

"But you shake me, you terrify me, when you tell me of cruelty to yourself. You are right to tell me for it is part of our compact. I broke that once when I wrote to Mary in bitterness and dejection, wishing to spare you. The mood is outlived, outworn. You'll forgive that. I tell you the truth now as I would have my eyes and ears tell the truth to my own soul.

"Now that I'm a captain you'll think I ought to be able to tell you how the war goes on and when it will end? Who knows? I know nothing. There are famous generals here, and I don't know whether they are Napoleons or duffers. I have no means of knowing, and I sometimes wonder whether those above me (and them!) have. I am skeptical and mistrust myself. I'm not born to lead. In despatches about this war I can find nothing better than what Ian Hamilton wrote about Gallipoli. I can see that he is an intelligent man. And yet I wonder sometimes whether his opposite might not have done the work better. His opposite, as I conceive it, is General Montero in *Nostromo*. Do you remember that egregious soldier—'imbecile and domineering'? What a world in which such a creature could prevail! No. I'll not believe

that even war is as bad as that. I'll believe in Ian Hamilton—in brains and character.

"The psychology of the trenches is a queer thing. We are up one day and down the next. It's a point of honor not to write home dolefully, and I'm afraid my letters to you would be considered quite wrong. I'm not doleful, I hope, but I hate deceiving myself, and you've taught me, bravely, not to deceive you.

"Sibyl, if they persecute you in England, if they are cruel to you, I cannot bear it. I will not bear it. I will refuse my duty. I have not a sword or I would break it. You are more to me than England, more than honor. You rank yourself with the enemies of England, but all the best that I can conceive of loyalty and service and love comes through you. I haven't lived in vain. And the child is coming. A little German? Englishman? (or woman—which you will). The child will not know how to hate."

Sibyl replied:—

"No, Geoffrey, you will not break your sword, you will not refuse your duty. I will not accept from you anything less than the best. If you failed in your duty through me it would make me miserable always. Think! You have only to think. Remember our old Idea. It has not failed, has it? We did 'bring it off'? I want you to tell our child about it some day.

"Geoffrey, it is not an important matter that a few Germans should not be treated politely. No, I will

not write like that; it's insincere. I do feel that I am wronged. I am deeply wronged. I am not bad. I have done no harm. It may be right to imprison me or to kill me, but it cannot be right to look at me or think of me unkindly. What are we to do? And what are nobly-minded men and women in Germany to do? Perhaps you are all right and we are all wrong. I rebel against what I hear and read among you, and yet all that great sum of conviction and indignation dinning in my ears affects me; there are times when I am confused and abased. This talk of Germans being fiends is nonsense. I am superior to that.

"Geoffrey, we all think too much of the mere winning. Partly I stand aside and can see. You may be beaten and yet be greater than you were; you may be second and yet greater than when you were first. You may lose the war to your infinite gain. Yet it seems that mercy comes neither with victory nor defeat.

"I would not ask English people for mercy, but I would wish them to be merciful, for they are your people and even mine. Everywhere I hear them crying: 'We must not have mercy.' It is possible to be ruthless nobly and not spitefully. Geoffrey, I have known what it is to be hissed on the stage. It is unkind to poor actors who are doing their best. It is wicked to hiss me because I am a German. I felt it very bitterly.

"I do not keep back anything. I often thought about your having written to Mary what I must not

see, but that's nothing now. There was a time when I said to Mary: 'You that should love me!' And she replied: 'I'd do anything in the world for you.' Do! I've never conquered quite the last bit of Mary, but we're friends now. I trust her and love her.

"Yes, Geoffrey, I do understand what you say about being a Christian. More and more I turn to Christ. The legend is like any other. I am not becoming superstitious. I know you can't always be meek, I know it was right of you to go and fight, but Christ's meekness must save the world. You English may be in the right—I do not know—perhaps the Jews and Pontius Pilate were in the right. If I am buffeted and spat upon—I dare to use such words—I feel my fellowship with Him. I could turn to Mary, the mother of Christ, now that my child is coming. I am just like the other mothers. Sometimes I think of it as a pleasant English boy, but I am not superstitious; I don't know whether it's a boy or a girl. But—not peace but a sword! My child is born into a world of strife. I shall lose it. All mothers lose their children. The sharp pain of loss may not be worse than to see them drifting away from you. Will it be a perpetual reproach to have had a German mother? Ah! You implacable English. No, Geoffrey. Noble English, noble England."

He never replied. The letter came to him on an evening of anxious preparation. He re-read it in the gray of the dawn of his last evening, while he waited for the signal to advance.

CHAPTER XXVI

SPECTATORS

FRESH from the East, with the bronze of the sun and the pallor of sickness contending on his face, Burke turned into the old tea-shop, wondering whether that former repository for gossip would be good for news. The light was dim in the lower room which was nearly empty. But Imalian sat there, turning the pages of a book which rested on the table. He turned listless eyes on Burke, and then rose hesitatingly and they shook hands. "You back?" said Imalian politely, and then he added with commiseration: "You look bad."

"That's nothing," said Burke. "Touches of fever." After a remark or two, Burke said "What's the news?"

"Attar is wounded. Severe. Not dangerous, I hope."

"I didn't know he was out."

"You've heard about Arden?"

"I saw his name among the killed. Where was it and how?"

"What does it matter?" said Imalian.

"Oh! Come!"

"I beg pardon. I'm exasperated. I seem to be always exasperated now."

Burke said: "I find it hard to see you so."

"Yes," said Imalian. "Do you remember Arden chaffing me about my Eastern calm? He used to throw about such words as mystical and philosophic. And there was that line of Rossetti's: 'The years recede, the years advance.' I was the sphinx-like one that saw it all without blinking. And I dare say there was something in it. I seem to have lost all that."

"You'll get it back," said Burke. "But why are you exasperated?"

"Oh! I suppose the world's folly, my powerlessness."

Weakly, Burke said: "You have your books."

Imalian glared at him. "Yes," he said, "I have my books."

They were silent awhile, and then Burke said: "Does Mrs. Arden—how does she——?"

Imalian looked at him quickly and turned away. He said gently: "She is dead."

"Oh, dear!" said Burke. "The pretty, charming creature. How was it—what——?"

"You are a great nation," said Imalian.

"I don't understand."

"What is one German girl?"

"Do you mean to say," said Burke, "that she was used badly?"

"She was very sensitive."

"Persecution! And Arden fighting?"

"She died after their child was born," said Imalian. "She had no strength left."

"Do you mean that the brutes harried her to death?"

"Oh! You're a great nation."

"I'm an Irishman."

"I beg your pardon. I'd lost sight of that. Yes; perhaps you're one of us."

"One of what?"

"The beaten. The forlorn. And we Armenians should be grateful to the English. They have often been indignant about us."

"What happened to her?"

"She died after childbirth. I don't say it wasn't a natural death. I don't know. I had been seeing her sometimes. I had come to regard her as the finest person in the world. In my world. I tried to make her amused with things. She was too sensitive. And then there was Arden's death."

"She knew of that?"

"They were keeping it from her. She learnt it by some inference. She was very sharp. Sharp! What a word to use of her! Her beautiful intuitions."

"That killed her?"

"Oh, I don't know. If you like. I'm not quite sane about it."

"The child lives."

"Yes. It's a boy. In the care of Miss Arden—Mary Arden. All right, I believe."

"What will she do with the poor boy?"

"Do with him?"

"She's a fanatic. She'll make him something that there's no place for in this world."

"No. I think not. She wants to efface herself. She'll try to do what her brother would have done. And then her conscience will bring the mother in. The child's bent, too. You needn't fear that he'll be dragooned into her sort of pacifism. She'll worry herself over it, of course."

"Imalian, were those two women friends?"

Imalian pondered it. "Not exactly. And yet they were devoted to one another, too. I think Mary Arden reproaches herself. Needlessly? I can't say what are the needs of such a nature. Yes, she was devoted to her. She speaks of her as of a saint."

"It's a stupid question, but did she—Mrs. Arden—die—peacefully?"

"Quietly at the last, I think. But there was a time before the end when she couldn't be controlled. She shouted that she was German, that she was English, I don't know what. And constantly it was 'The noble English—the noble English.'"

"What! Ironical?"

"No, no. She was thinking of him. She was calling to him."

They were silent again. Imalian got up and, looking at Burke, said kindly: "I hope you're getting on all right."

Burke assented listlessly.

Imalian tucked his book under his arm and stood there staring into vacancy. "Yes," he said, "a very great nation. And you're in the right. I mean those damned British. I'm glad you're an Irishman."

And he shook hands with him.

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